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ABSTRACT

This guide is a compilation of tips for administrators, particularly secondary school administrators, on a wide variety of topics. It includes all tips published in a National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) newsletter from 1981 to 1989. "How-to" information is provided in all the following areas: first-year teacher assistance, human relations, technology-assisted administration, improved supervising, conscious-effort administration, school improvement mission statements, school vandalism, staff communication, staff evaluations, homework programs, school-communication crisis planning, staff development, cocurricular activities, information use, teacher observations, public speaking, death in school, and staff members' personal problems at school. Also covered are staff meetings, inservice education, student input, inservice climate, substitute teaching programs, writing skills, assistant principal effectiveness, desktop publishing, lobbying, research, school assemblies, personnel management, time management, staff motivation, instructional use of microcomputers, school newsletters, teacher absenteeism, library/media centers, school newspapers, beginning the school year, student teachers, special student mainstreaming, student leaders and student and school goals, and writing for publication. (JPT)

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# TIPS

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

# *Tips for Principals*

## *from NASSP*

*TIPS:* **1981-1989**

National Association of Secondary School Principals
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# Foreword

Responding to the needs of readers is an essential responsibility of all publishers and editors. NASSP, through surveys and a variety of meetings, keeps a close ear to what members and readers are saying and recommending. *TIPS* actually was launched in 1981 in recognition of what NASSP members and readers were telling us: to write as briefly as possible on subjects that are important to school administrators.

That we were on target with *TIPS* has been shown in virtually all surveys of Association members since 1981. Respondents indicate that they place high value on this two-page, single sheet newsletter. While initially we published it as a quarterly, we quickly went to six times a year, and now we publish *TIPS* monthly.

A long-standing policy of the Association is to keep back titles in print for five years, then to declare them out-of-print unless there is considerable demand for those titles. We followed that policy for *TIPS;* but because of the demand for back titles, we are reprinting here all issues from 1981 to 1989 under one cover so they are easily available.

We hope they continue to meet the needs of school administrators and provide a ready resource of practical ideas on subjects of perennial interest.

Thomas F. Koerner
Associate Executive Director
and Director of Publications
NASSP

# How Principals Can Help First-Year Teachers

The survival of new teachers during their first roller-coaster year of teaching has never been so critical, as principals are increasingly faced with a shortage of qualified new teachers. As student enrollment across the nation grows steadily, the simultaneous outward migration of young teachers is expected to have a dramatic impact on the quality of education in the future.

In the first year of attitudinal highs and lows, new teachers experience a "euphoric" stage in September. During this first month, they believe nothing can stop them. Then, around the middle of October, a "curve of disenchantment" begins, resulting in a profound professional attitude shift. By the end of February, some new teachers stop seeing themselves as student advocates and, with lowered self-esteem, begin to see their classroom task as primarily custodial and their personal task as survival.

Principals can adopt a basic set of assumptions in a new teacher orientation and guidance that can turn first-year teachers' disenchantment into a period of growth and development. The assumptions target the principal's assistance for new teachers as either direct assistance or assistance through veteran colleagues.

## Basic Assumptions for Principals

- Principals must accept that they cannot provide all the support a new teacher needs. They must endeavor to create a larger school climate of support by getting as many other people involved in providing assistance as possible.
- Most teachers have not suffered publicly until their first year in the classroom. During their first year, new teachers are likely to anguish over their uncertainty and humiliation in the classroom as sustaining public embarrassment on a daily basis.
- Formal teacher education will have minimal effect for new teachers when applied in the classroom. They become bewildered by the realization that although they have pedagogical knowledge, they have not yet developed the skills necessary to actually teach day after day.
- Situations that seemed familiar when observed or tried during student teaching become dilemmas for new teachers as they take on numerous situational responsibilities for the first time in their own classroom.
- The new teacher must still learn how to discipline students. A parallel can be made for the discipline process between teaching and driving. "You get the license, then you learn how to drive."
- Parents have no concept of the need to make allowances for first-year teachers. Their power to add to the stress endured by new teachers is alarming.
- The principal should not be a parental figure for new teachers. If such a relationship is established, new teachers often feel betrayed when the principal disciplines them.

## Direct Principal Assistance

- Begin programs to help new teachers before mid-October! Assistance during the first two months is essential.
- Give first-year teachers an easier schedule than veterans. They also need clear delineation of tasks beyond the classroom so they can acquire an overall view of schoolwide performance expectations. The winds of curriculum expectations blowing from basics to self-actualization and back are hard enough to follow, without the added burden of multi-faceted schoolwide expectations.
- Identify a specific veteran teacher who will coordinate the new teacher support program. Veteran teachers can serve as mentors in this program. This will provide a focused staff development for new teachers that is consistent during the first several weeks of the school year. The coordinator can then

conduct monthly support meetings for new teachers and their mentors. Approach the school site council or parent club for a small stipend for the coordinator.

- Ensure that the schedule of each new teacher and mentor is arranged so they are not teaching at the same time. This allows them to use released time for collegial planning, visitations, and/or observations.
- Support avenues of financial flexibility for new teachers to provide supplementary materials and instructional supplies.
- Conduct faculty meetings as real learning experiences, leaving the sports schedules to be distributed in the mailboxes. Released day meetings can be used for mini-course programs designed to encourage staff development, cluster meetings, peer coaching, and inservice.
- Foster the positive image of the teaching profession by providing opportunities for new teacher involvement in teaching incentive programs with government agencies, private enterprise, and teacher education institutions.
- Enhance the idea of teaching as a calling because this perspective influences the ethos of the building. Encourage questioning and collegial sharing. "What does it mean for these new teachers to grow professionally?"
- Make new teachers aware that while they may feel uncertain and maybe even humiliated at times, in many cases they have more answers than they realize. They bring vitality to the profession!

## Principal Assistance Through Veteran Colleagues

- Avoid the "curve of disenchantment" by using the talents and craft knowledge of veteran colleagues to model teaching as a steady pace of growth, not as a series of rollercoaster ups and downs.
- Provide each new teacher with a support group of colleagues and a mentor teacher who has been trained to assist him or her. The principal must be involved in identifying the proper people to help new teachers, but cannot be the main director of the support group.
- Create a climate and specific opportunities in which new teachers talk with other new teachers as well as experienced colleagues about teaching. Managing instructional time, classroom discipline, curriculum standards, motivating and evaluating students, parent conferences, paper correction tips, and grading techniques are possible topics. These topics can be presented via panel and small group discussions or as interactive television sessions that are available any time on campus.
- Support experienced teachers in helping new teachers to realize it is not only advisable, but necessary that they try certain strategies again and again in the classroom until these skills are mastered.
- Recognize the complexities of the pedagogy of teaching and be complimentary to the enterprise of veteran teachers training new colleagues.

With just a little organizational leadership the principal can shift the declining attitude of new teachers from "If I can just get through this year," to "My first year has been such a great source of learning, support, and positive reinforcement that nothing can stop me now!"

*Written by Nancy M. Giberson, principal at Torrey Pines High School, San Dieguito School District, Encinitas, Calif.*

Tips for Principals *is a bimonthly publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091. Gerald A. Purdy, President; Scott D. Thomson, Executive Director; Thomas F. Koerner, Director of Publications; Carol Bruce, Associate Director; Patricia George, Editor.*

# How To Add the Human Dimension for More Effective Schools

In the wake of recent reports about the condition of education, mutual support from all branches of education is imperative.

One basic strategy that will help schools be more effective is a continuing dialog between teachers and principals. This adds a touch of humanism throughout the school and makes it a more effective climate for learning.

The first step is to establish a communication forum for all staff. By providing such a forum, the principal encourages all personnel to share their opinions, suggestions, frustrations, and problems.

A considerate principal communicates and interprets policies to everyone on staff and maintains a written policy book that explains rules and regulations in detail. The principal also explains any changes in policies and procedures.

Calvin Coolidge once said, "I have never been hurt by anything I didn't say." However, since silence can be interpreted either as giving consent or as silently rebuking, dialog will discourage confrontation and encourage staff input.

## Humanizing Academic Programs

The administrator can take several steps to encourage administrator-staff-student dialog:

- Avoid planned regimentation for both students and teachers.
- Schedule parent-teacher conferences at the convenience of teachers as well as parents.
- Keep classroom disruptions to a minimum. Schedule stability, teacher authority, and student needs should be basic goals.
- Allow teachers to use community resources to extend the limits of the classroom beyond the confines of the school.
- Establish a strong inservice program for teachers.
- If possible, provide each teacher with an office where he or she can plan and work—a "home base."
- Recognize staff and student accomplishments. This improves morale and motivates continued excellence. The most successful executives know the value of name recognition and rewards for excellence. Know staff and students by name and show an interest in their accomplishments.
- Develop a good public relations program. The public deserves a reasonably accurate account of the goals and long-range plans of the school and will support programs that reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. Invite the public to visit your school on special occasions such as anniversaries, awards assemblies, sports banquets, and graduations.
- Set up a speakers bureau for staff members to share their knowledge with community members and ask community leaders to speak to student and teacher groups. Public relations is a two-way street—travel both ways.
- Set a good example for students and staff. As role models, principals are placed on the same lofty level as the clergy, physicians, judges, and bank presidents. A principal must always maintain a public image that will be acceptable to the most fastidious parents and taxpayers in the community.
- Attend student and staff activities such as athletic contests, dances, field trips, band concerts, and drama productions. Parents, students, and teachers appreciate the principal's interest in them. In most cases, the sponsors of the activity will be flattered.

Remember: If the administrator treats the teachers fairly, the teachers in turn will pass this sensitivity and humanity on to their relationships with students. This caring relationship then helps students to learn.

"Students, as individuals, cannot be emphasized enough," says Hilmar Wagner in "The Student-Centered Classroom—Let's Not Replace It," (May 1982, *NASSP Bulletin*), "for if they have good concepts of themselves in relation to given classrooms, they will likely improve themselves. Therefore, by being more student-centered the teacher accomplishes a two-fold purpose: helping the students to learn, and helping them to develop as self-fulfilling individuals."

To make teachers feel like a more vital part of education, administrators must involve them in the education process. James J. Lynch, coordinator at Bensalem (Pa.) High School, suggests that teachers be involved in activities besides the teaching process, including after-school activities such as clubs and sports.

"The humanistic teacher must demonstrate a genuine concern for the welfare and progress of all students," Lynch asserts. "The humanistic teacher must also possess the quality of fairness . . . in the handling of students and parents. . . ."

Lynch also recommends that the humanistic

teacher be full of vitality for the long hours of involvement in education (December 1981 *NASSP Bulletin*).

The administrator can promote this involvement by taking an interest in teachers and their interests.

## Having the Human Touch

Theodore Sizer in the April 15, 1984 *New York Times Spring Survey of Education*, wrote "In effective schools . . . the key is the people, not the program. . . . The agenda for effectiveness, then, should focus primarily on the human dimensions—the teachers and principals. . . ."

Some of the problems in secondary school administration are not the result of a lack of competency, but the result of a lack of human touch—trust, respect, kindness, tact, fairness, and restraint. Administrators need to show an interest in what others think and do, no matter how trivial they may seem.

The principal must establish a school climate in which the rigorous professional/academic program is balanced with a measure of humanity.

How can the principal do this?

- The principal with the human touch is a good listener; but listening alone is not enough, it also requires hearing and doing.
- The humane principal is a rational observer who sees what is going on and constantly plans for improvement.
- The humane principal must also be able to communicate well with staff members. But, he or she must also be flexible enough to encourage staff initiatives and growth.
- Capable principals are creative and innovative, but they are also accountable. Untested ideas have a way of haunting the unwary.
- Principals with the human touch make decisions based on scholarly inquiry and research, but they also use common sense and the expertise of staff members. If a decision turns out to be a wrong one, the humane principal does not point an accusing finger at a staff member, absolving him or herself of the blame.
- Humane principals are well-organized and enthusiastic about their schools.
- The human dimension requires strong leadership skills; but more importantly, it requires sensitivity to teacher and student needs. Caring principals stand ready to help teachers solve the human equation in dealing with students but they do not second guess staff members' solutions any more than they like to be second guessed.
- Considerate principals allow staff members autonomy in their respective classrooms by helping them maintain a strong self-concept. Teachers must not only have academic freedom, but also the freedom to develop style, versatility, and stability.

Lynch asserts, ". . . the teacher's humanistic act in the classroom promotes student interest. The word act is used loosely and is intended to be almost theatrical. As the teacher's primary job is to present the material, the better the act the greater is the acceptance of the material by the students."

- Understanding principals try to anticipate problems before they get out of hand, but they also remember that timing and team effort are important in solving most problems.

When a principal can manage a school in such a manner that the staff and students are not intimidated; when self-motivation and self-discipline characterize the daily agenda of the entire school; and when each employee contributes his or her fair share to the overall education effort, the school is on its way to establishing a school climate that is right for effective learning. Then, defensive school leadership will be a thing of the past.

Effective principals never forget that the most important responsibility is the welfare and education of the youth.

*Sharon A. Fasenmyer, editorial consultant, Pennsylvania Association of Secondary School Principals*
*Joseph Mamana, editor*, Pennsylvania Schoolmaster



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# How To Administer a School Using Technology

Operating a school in the 1980s and beyond is an ever-increasing challenge for school principals.

With the onslaught of the communications revolution and the technology that was spawned by it, administrators are faced with the dilemma of deciding which technology they should use in the everyday school operation.

Some day-to-day operations common to all schools can be addressed by new technologies available to the school principal, including:

- Schedules
- Student records
- Grades
- Attendance
- Budgets
- Correspondence
- Reports
- Evaluations

However, before trying to use new technology in the daily running of the school, the administrator should do the following:

1. *Give priority to activities that happen daily.*

Do some activities take more time than they should? Are there mundane activities the principal or the support staff do that could be done more efficiently? These activities should be identified and the administrator should decide whether there is a way to do them more efficiently with a computer or other technologies.

2. *Analyze which activities would benefit most if done by or assisted by a computer or another technology.*

After identifying some activities that might be done more efficiently by technology, the administrator should research how that activity is being done more efficiently elsewhere and with what equipment.

One of the biggest pitfalls in using new technologies, such as computers, is using them for something for which they are not needed, e.g., scheduling a high school of 50 students. Explore the cost effectiveness of technology use.

3. *Research the hardware and software needed to meet the identified goals.*

This can be a time-consuming effort for all involved, but need not be if the principal accesses already available resources. Chances are, an in-house expert or a district person will be available as a resource in deciding which equipment and materials to use.

If no local resource is available, the next step is to look at school administrators statewide or nationwide. There is, without a doubt, someone out there who has had a similar problem and has solved it.

4. *Decide what training is needed.*

Once equipment is selected to help operate the school office more efficiently, the principal should decide how much time must be invested to learn the hardware and software and who will need the training. Learning to use the equipment and the software is probably the biggest investment you will make; if you learn to do something right the first time, then you will be much more efficient with that tool as time goes on.

## What Technology Is Available?

A discussion of how to administer a school with technology wouldn't be complete without a list of the technologies that are now available and how they can be used.

**Integrated Software Packages**

These are software packages that include two or three of the major software tools created for a computer: word processor, spreadsheet, and a data base. Much of the correspondence, evaluations, budgeting, and student record keeping can be done with the use of one of these packages.

Some important questions to ask before buying and using integrated packages are:

- What machine will this software operate on?
- Does the package allow for mailmerging between the data base and the word processor?
- Can the software be used on a hard disk and with a network?
- What kind of sorting is available with the data base?
- Can I cut and paste from my spreadsheet to my word processor?
- Can the software be used with a laser printer?

**Scheduling, Attendance, and Grading Packages**

Many integrated software packages on the market today address these tasks for schools of all sizes. Some can work on personal computers, while others may require a minicomputer system with a network and multiple terminals. Following are some questions to ask before buying and using this type of software:

- Does the program create a schedule for you or do you have to put in a schedule first?
- Does it allow for conflict matrixes to be run?

- Can the data input for one section of the program be used in other areas of the program?
- Is security built into the program?
- Does the program generate reports such as honor roll, missed grades, etc.?
- Does the program allow for different ways to input data—i.e., scanner, light pen, or card reader?

**Hardware**

Just as there are many different types of software on the market, there are quite a few pieces of hardware to choose from. Some are more appropriate for administrative and office use than classroom use. Some questions that should be asked before purchasing hardware for office use are as follows:

- Is the equipment compatible with the software being considered?
- What kind of support will be available from the local vendor?
- Is networking possible with the equipment?
- What storage peripherals are standard and available for upgrade?
- What type of printer can be used with the equipment and the software?

**Local Area Networks**

Chances are, in an attempt to solve office problems and be more efficient, administrators have noticed that much of the information they need is also needed by others in the school, including secretaries, counselors, assistants, etc.

When considering using technology to run a school, the principal should consider the use of local area networks. These are computer systems that consist of the following:

1. Hard disk (storage device)
2. Transmission medium (twisted pair wire, fiber-optics, coaxial cable)
3. Management software (allows different computers to communicate back and forth with each other)
4. Interface cards in each terminal or personal computer used.

Local area networks can also be used to share other peripheral devices such as printers and modems. Not only can networking save money by sharing peripherals, but it also allows many people to use the same piece of software, such as a word processor, spreadsheet, or even an integrated school management package.

The key advantage to networking is that different people in the building can access and share information in the same format.

## New Technologies for the Office

At present, quite a few pieces of equipment and software are available for principals to use in their offices. What they purchase and use depends on their particular needs.

- Lap top computers: Can you communicate from your lap top to your regular computer and/or printer? Can it run for several hours before being recharged? Is the software you buy for the portable compatible with already existing hardware and software? Can a modem be attached at a later time for communication purposes? Does it have enough on-board memory storage?
- Modems: Many school districts are using electronic mail services or electronic bulletin boards. Are the modem and the communication software you purchase easy to use and appropriate to your needs? What data base services are you investigating for office use, e.g., Easynet, Dialog, Compuserve, the Source, and EdLine? Does one of the new integrated software packages already have a communications package built in?
- Optical Reading Devices: There is more than one way to input data into a computer. This can be particularly important with a scheduling/attendance/grading package where large amounts of data must be given to the computer.
- CD ROM: These new technologies will be appropriate in school management very soon. Data base companies and others are coming out with discs that can be used for searching archival data that may be needed to manage the school. The ERIC data base is already available on disc. Universities are putting small video tours on videodisc so students can see what the school looks like before visiting.

  Soon, a new CD medium will be available for schools to keep archival data such as student records, health records, and transcripts. This medium will be called WORM (write once read many times). Look for this technology being applied more to the management of our schools in the future.
- Calling systems: Some schools are going to computer calling systems to keep track of attendance. If a student is absent, the computer will call the home with a recorded message in hopes of getting an answer from the absent student or his or her parents. Systems like this decrease truancy rates and keep accurate accounts of student absences.

Remember: Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Many administrators are already using technology to run a school. Use them as a resource for your many questions on how to manage a school using technology.

*Dennis Dempsey, principal, Homer (Alaska) High School.*

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# How To Be a Better Supervisor

*Instead of griping about the boss, you're now the boss. . . .*
*Instead of griping about policy, you're the one who must implement policy. . . .*
*Instead of just waiting for someone to appraise you, you're the one who must do the appraisal of others.*

Martin Broadwell wrote that summary in *The New Supervisor* (Second Edition) to reflect the dilemmas and the opportunities that face supervisors in business and industry. But it also applies to principals, whose jobs include supervisory as well as administrative functions.

Like supervisors in other lines of work, most principals have come up through the ranks and their training for the job has focused on administrative, rather than supervisory, duties.

Following are tips to make the supervisory part of your job a little easier:

## Definition and Duties

Supervision, according to a commonly accepted definition, "is the art of accomplishing work through the efforts and abilities of other people." In fact, said Maxine H. Bishop in *Dynamic Supervision: Problems and Opportunities*, "the difference between a good and a poor supervisor may be the ability to work effectively with people in solving problems."

Is such ability innate? No, apparently not. Volumes have been written to help supervisors learn necessary skills. Bishop breaks these skills into two broad categories: conceptual skills and interpersonal skills. A good supervisor must have both, she says.

*Conceptual skills* include planning; organizing (figuring out, for example, the best use of available people, resources, time); directing (pointing the way or motivating staff, communicating with them, and serving as their leader); and controlling (knowing what is going on, soon enough, well enough, to do something about wrong directions).

*Interpersonal skills* are also called human relations skills, or the ability to get along with people.

How much attention should a principal give to each type of skill? "Good supervisors know they must pay as much attention to human relations matters as to technical and administrative matters. In other words," advises Lester R. Bittle, author of the best-selling textbook on supervision, *What Every Supervisor Should Know*, "be as employee-centered as you are job- or task-centered in your interest." Time spent maintaining group cohesiveness, direction, and morale, according to Bittle, is as worthwhile as that spent on administrative functions.

Bittle reinforces his conviction by quoting the results of a study of 85 companies conducted by the National Management Association. It revealed the six supervisory pitfalls that commonly cause supervisors to fail:

- Poor personal relations with workers or with other management people
- Individual shortcomings such as lack of initiative and emotional instability
- Lack of understanding of the management point of view
- Unwillingness to spend the necessary time and effort to improve
- Lack of skill in planning and organizing work
- Inability to adjust to new and changing conditions.

Like their counterparts in business and industry, educators who advise on supervisory skills often emphasize how difficult and rewarding the use of good human relations skills can be: difficult because of the absolute necessity of knowing and using many different approaches with individuals or groups; rewarding because good supervision can result in growth and fulfillment for both employees and supervisor. This, in turn, can build a strong staff, more capable and willing to provide top-notch education to students.

## Human Relations Tips

So, what can you do? A variety of suggestions come from James Huge, a former teacher and principal in Nebraska and Kansas, who is now a popular speaker on the topic of leadership and motivation. He prefaces his talks to administrators with this bit of advice from Carter Administration official Bert Lance: "If it ain't broken, don't fix it." In other words, he says, "examine what you are already doing. Don't pick up every idea simply because it was suggested; pick it up if you need it, and then adapt it to your own style."

Drawing on his own experience and research, Huge lists skills exhibited by effective principals in their roles as supervisors and leaders:

- They care a great deal about those with whom

they work, and they find a comfortable way, within their own style, to let those people know they care. To care, Huge says, you have to know everyone with whom you work well enough to know what makes them tick. He gives this example of caring: "One of the highest forms of caring is to let those teachers who are not performing well know that you consider their performance inadequate and support them in improvement efforts."

- They are confident, but humble. "You have to be confident because people follow people who, they think, know where they are going. But these same people will not follow you or get turned off, if you go too far or get overconfident or cocky."
- They laugh a lot. "It's a leadership skill, a survival skill."
- They already have or they develop superb listening skills.
- They are flexible and *inconsistent*—not in goals or discipline—but in what they do to solve a problem.
- They are excellent time managers.
- They seek new ideas, are comfortable sharing new ideas, and encourage the same thing among their teachers.

Additional advice comes from Louisiana principal David E. Lee. Speaking to principals at an NASSP convention, Lee said "good supervision comes out of your dealings with your staff and your peers. There's no magic kit it comes from." He offered these additional tips:

- Change doesn't come quickly in the supervisory process. Be patient.
- As a supervisor, you must set standards so people know what you want them to do.
- Visibility is one of the greatest assets you have as a supervisor of instruction. Both the teachers and the students should see you often and expect to see you often.
- Don't take the entire responsibility yourself when something doesn't go right. Teachers have to take some of the responsibility.
- Versatility, flexibility, optimism, and good communication skills are musts in the supervisory process.
- You've got to be sincere. Do what you say you are going to do, and keep promises.
- Develop a sense of timing. Knowing when to do something can be as important as knowing how to do something.

## The Most Difficult Part of the Job

For many supervisors, the most difficult part of their job is to evaluate the performance of an employee. But any supervisor who is not able to make a definitive appraisal of an employee's work is not discharging his or her full responsibility. Overlooking poor performance lowers the standards for the school and for all other employees, and it actually harms the inept person who is allowed to get by.

Two points are important to remember: 1.) If the supervisor keeps employees informed on a continuing basis of how well they are doing, where the weak spots are, and means of improvement, written evaluations are simply affirmations of what has already been discussed and worked on. 2.) The supervisor has an obligation to help employees improve. This requires knowledge of motivation techniques appropriate for each individual employee.

Among the techniques supervisors can draw on to motivate both good and below-par employees are: compliments, awards, showing a real interest in the individual and his or her job, smiling, using the person's name, talking about subjects of special interest to the person, and letting the person know how his or her actions can help you.

Some supervisors also successfully use these techniques: appealing to the pride of an individual or group, getting individuals to make a commitment, and challenging them.

Experts also highly recommend that supervisors give praise—judiciously and honestly—for a job well done.

### How Do You Measure Up?

Teachers and other staff members value supervisors who:

—Clearly state expectations and assist employees in meeting them
—Are honest, consistent, and aboveboard in all dealings with staff
—Are around when they are needed
—Communicate necessary information, as soon as it is available and before it gets distorted by the grapevine
—Recognize and are openly appreciative of extra effort, good results, attempts to improve
—Ask teachers their opinions and involve them meaningfully in decisions that affect them
—Make their own judgment of each person's ability, rather than depend on hearsay or the perceptions of the previous supervisor
—Hold themselves, as well as employees, accountable for their performance.

*Written by Shirley Boes Neill, Carmichael, Calif.*

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# How To Be a Conscious-Effort Administrator

The popularity of books such as *In Search of Excellence* and *Theory Z* attests to America's present preoccupation with better products, happier customers, and positive employee attitudes.

If one were to examine leadership/management style from the viewpoint of the individual, however, one might discover that some very effective and capable leaders have difficulty transferring management theory from the theoretical realm to the realm of application.

The necessary blending of many management theories into a functional, eclectic one produces a very diversified leader who may find the formal application of any one theory inappropriate for his or her specific situation.

While the corporate world of big business and high technology and the world of education may have some similarities, the differences make the management theories that are so effective in the business world appear a little impractical and alien to the world of educational management. For example, each product in the field of education should ideally be processed individually and with no one employee overseeing the completion of the process and the product.

## Educational Leadership—Theory into Practice

Educational leadership depends on continuing participation in the processes that accomplish institutional goals. The involvement in the mechanics of management is far more important than the espousing of a preferred management theory.

Administrative leadership involves the conscious effort of the administrator to do all those little things that should be done each day but that are often pushed into the background of daily crisis management.

The buses arrive each day at school. The doors open, students enter, and the school day is managed by the programmed ringing of school bells. In this regimentation, the educational leader must make a conscious effort to perform certain behaviors, including the following:

- *Attend all school activities and functions.* This may seem impossible, and it may well be; however, the effective principal should make a conscious effort to attend as many activities and functions as possible. Don't let other less-demanding items divert you from this important element of management. Participants, sponsors, and pupils feel good when the principal attends school functions.
- *Interview a student each day.* Become better acquainted with students. Learn about their families, hobbies, and attitudes toward life. Learn what they like and dislike about school.
- *Visit each classroom at least once a week.* Don't stop at the door; go in and really visit.
- *Make a home contact each day.* Make a phone call or write a short note or postcard home each day to report the accomplishments or positive attributes of a student. Let the parents know how much you appreciate their child and how proud they should be of him or her.
- *Walk the halls.* Management by walking around the building is a very specific task. Principals should make that special effort to be in the halls, especially during class break, to visit with students and teachers. Give that pat on the back for achievements, encourage, and have a personal awareness of what's going on in the school. Contact teachers, staff members, custodians, and cooks and find out what is on their minds.
- *Thank staff members.* Write a short note or thank-you card expressing appreciation to faculty sponsors and staff members who perform some noteworthy or special services to the school. Formally recognize and reward their efforts. Don't delay or the effect will be diminished.
- *Provide feedback about discipline measures.* Be sure you provide feedback to faculty members who bring students to the office for discipline. Let them know what actions you took to support them and to change the student's behavior.
- *Write a letter to spouses.* Write a letter to the spouses of employees, thanking them for the support they give. Note the special qualities of the spouse who works in your school and how much you personally appreciate the loyalty and support both of them give.
- *Travel on team/program buses.* Be determined to

travel with each team or school organization to at least one of their activities or functions. Sit with the coaches and sponsors and talk with them. Encourage and support their efforts.

• *Practice conscious-effort listening.* Always listen to each question and request in its entirety. Listen to the request as if it were the most important request.

• *Send birthday cards to faculty and staff members.* Mail a birthday card to the faculty and staff members' *homes*—they are more personal that way.

• *Provide refreshments and door prizes.* Give refreshments and a door prize at each faculty and staff meeting. Let people know you value them and their collective efforts to discuss and resolve schoolwide issues.

• *Send appreciation letters to district office personnel.* Write letters to members of the district office staff, thanking them for assisting and supporting you. These people seldom receive formal "thank yous" for the services they provide.

• *Provide candy in the main office for school visitors.* Place some penny candy in the office for visitors, making sure small children get a piece if their parents approve. Parents will appreciate the gesture, which reinforces the idea that "children are our business."

• *Invite neighborhood businesses to school.* Invite owners, managers, and employees of neighborhood businesses—big and small—to visit the school. Open the lines of communication and let them know that your goal is to be a good neighbor.

• *Show employees you care.* Hold a stewardship interview with each employee. Ask how things are going, what special things they are doing and would like to do, and find out what things they feel they need in order to accomplish their goals. Try to provide the things they really need and be enthusiastic about their ability to succeed.

• *Develop a monthly calendar of events.* Include graphic depictions of activities, events, and special days. Place a large version in the office window and provide personal-size copies to staff and students.

• *Display student products and pictures of students.* Encourage the placement of student products and pictures in the halls, on walls, and in public areas. Items should be changed monthly.

• *Organize a school improvement committee.* Hold monthly meetings for the committee to address school problems and identify solutions. The committee should be made up of faculty, staff, and administration members.

• *Organize parent and student advisory committees.* Hold monthly meetings for each committee. Their meetings will provide you with valuable insights into the thinking of both parents and students.

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*Written by James McCoy, principal at Northwest Intermediate School, Salt Lake City, Utah, and John Childs, principal at Dixon Middle School in Provo, Utah.*

## A Dozen Sound Suggestions

Raymond E. Lemley, in the January 1983 *Bulletin*, offers 12 sound suggestions that may help principals be better leaders:

1. The decisive principal will prevail; almost everyone else will be indecisive.
2. The principal's responsibility to his or her people: Create an environment for individual growth, success, and opportunity.
3. Effective principals should identify those in the school who are truly dedicated, creative, energetic, and loyal, and should build around them and support them.
4. Work at solving problems one at a time.
5. Leadership is often a contest of wills; thus, persistence wins.
6. The boss cannot give the effective principal authority; authority is exactly what is extracted.
7. The effective principal avoids owning someone else's problems; undoubtedly he or she will have enough personal problems to work on.
8. When you can make a choice between "effective" and "efficient," first be effective, then be efficient.
9. When the data conflict with common sense, abandon the data.
10. Master the previous; then do the subsequent.
11. When you have solved a problem, you will probably generate others.
12. Planning is neither complicated nor difficult. Boring, possibly. Tedious and time-consuming, always. The effective principal may be tempted to avoid it.



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# How To Build a Mission Statement for School Improvement

Many schools are like rudderless boats, riding the waves of fad and reform from one end of the education spectrum to the other.

Innovation and change in schools frequently mirror innovation and change in society as a whole; however, due to the diversity of public opinion and expectations regarding the role of the schools, individuals and groups in society may not agree about the role of schools, regardless of the current trends and fads.

These disagreements may be based on cognitive vs. affective, individual vs. society, vocational vs. academic, and religious vs. secular ideas.

As these different emphases pull against one another, the rudder of the school turns from side to side in a futile effort to accommodate both.

When faced with this situation, an effective school demonstrates the characteristics of a high-performance organization with a commonly held sense of mission as a foundation, able to steer its own course through the maze of societal hopes and expectations.

Effective schools confront conflicting societal expectations with a firm sense of where they are headed. While not discounting the wishes of parents and other community groups, they clearly state their priorities from the outset.

A written mission statement is a highly visible feature of effective schools. In addition to stating the school's priorities, it reflects the commitment of the administration and staff to the school's mission.

## The Role of the Principal

Staff members will probably not feel a common sense of mission unless the principal has taken an active role in formulating and articulating that mission. This role may include direct involvement in the formulation of the statement, the writing of the statement, or at least close contact with the committee charged with writing the statement.

Leaders of effective schools operate with a dual vision of where they see the school now and what they see it becoming in the future. Whatever their leadership style, they concentrate on those activities that will close the gap between the two.

The mission statement is an important vehicle whereby the principal may communicate this dual vision to staff, students, and the community, and give purpose to the daily activities of the school. Too often, principals see their role as one of managing what is, rather than leading toward what could be. Such administrators may relate well to staff members and students and may effectively maintain the daily routine, but they are not leaders whose actions will motivate staff and students toward significant school improvement.

Administrators must not be afraid that by expressing their conceptions of a good school and its mission they will "stir up trouble." They can provide valuable, useful guidance.

Above all else, leaders of high-performing systems carry out the mission of their organization.

## Developing a Mission Statement

Developing and articulating a sense of mission requires effort, perseverance, communication, human relations skills, a sense of vision, and a willingness to publicly affirm one's beliefs.

When developing a mission statement, principals should consider the following:

- The mission statement must be clearly articulated. Some administrators communicate a sense of mission by example (i.e., symbolic actions, time allocations, etc.), others by persuasion.
- A formal, written mission statement should be in place before any school improvement efforts are undertaken. This helps avoid a haphazard approach to school improvement in which numerous, sometimes conflicting efforts occur simultaneously and the staff members are drained of vital energy and motivation.
- The committee charged with writing the mission statement should include volunteers representing all of the different subgroups within the staff and community; race, sex, and age equity are vital.

Academic, vocational, and special education teachers should be represented, as well as parents and retired persons from the community.

In spite of the heterogeneous makeup of the group, the committee members should share a commitment to base the mission statement on group consensus; the statement should reflect the

beliefs upon which everyone agrees.

- As a starting place, the committee might solicit staff and community members' views about their philosophy of education, child growth and development, and the roles of teachers and parents in this process. A brief questionnaire might accomplish this first step.
- Once committee members begin drafting the mission statement, frequent communication among committee members, staff members, and community members is important.

Representatives from these groups should have the opportunity to review and edit successive drafts of the statement. The principal should play an important role as a communications liaison.

- The document should be written in short, logically connected statements that clearly reflect specific goals. During the revision process, superfluous statements will be eliminated so the final drafted form should not exceed one page.
- When completed, the mission statement should be posted throughout the school: in the main office, hallways, and in each classroom.

Copies can also be displayed in local community centers and businesses—anywhere people connected with the school gather. A copy should also be sent to every parent.

- The mission statement should serve as a guide in orientation sessions for new staff members, students, parents, and school visitors. Principals should rely on the statement to explain the rationale for any school policy or practice.
- The administration and staff should consciously strive, through word and action, to symbolize their commitment to the mission statement.
- At some point, students—especially those at the secondary level—should be encouraged to develop their own mission statement. Many of the suggestions listed above would apply to a student mission statement.
- Program, policy, and procedural changes within the school should take place with the mission statement in mind. It should serve as the rationale for change.
- Do not allow the mission statement to become a philosophical straitjacket; avoid "carving the statement into stone." The committee members should periodically review the statement for possible revisions.

High-performing, instructionally effective schools are characterized by a consensus regarding the school's basic goals.

That such schools are able to remain on course while besieged by the demands and expectations of society is due, in part, to the fact that they know where they are headed.

*Written by John Farley, assistant principal at Linmoor Middle School, Columbus, Ohio.*

**A Cha lenge for Principals**

. . . Secondary principals face a tremendo s challenge in the 1980s. That challenge revolves around recognizing, analyzing, and helping the public to understand the multiple dilemmas affecting school goals and school effectiveness. Social changes and a depressed economy present awesome barriers to the determination of appropriate goals for secondary education, but the challenge can be met by the concerted efforts of informed and active principals.

In order to do so, principals may be required to adopt a special set of conceptual lenses and to use their knowledge of the schooling process. These lenses and skills should help them clarify the missions of public secondary schools and assess the most satisfactory and realistic way of achieving them. Changing goals and declining resources will affect the structure, technology, practices, and norms of the school.

*Harold Dodge, "Determining Appropriate Goals for Secondary Schools: The Precursor of Effectiveness,"* NASSP Bulletin, *October 1983.*



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# How To Combat School Vandalism

Each school year ends with a multi-million dollar loss due to vandalism. The range of vandalism is as wide as the imagination—from killing goldfish and hamsters to massive destruction by fire. The latter accounts for a loss of almost $100 million annually, or almost 20 percent of total school vandalism.

Other forms of vandalism involve broken windows and doors, painted walls, defaced furniture, broken lavatory fixtures, and even tire tracks on the school lawn and in the stadium.

The cost of these overt forms of aggression cannot be measured monetarily alone; the ultimate effects resound in every corner of the educational system. The crucial issue should not be how much the loss costs in dollars and cents, but what the losses cost the instructional program.

A fire, for instance, will destroy not only thousands of dollars of equipment, but also irreplaceable records that have taken hours to prepare. Combined, these factors erode faculty and staff morale, which may mean months or possibly years of reduced academic performance.

The loss of the expensive equipment may be partially recovered by insurance, but the teachers will also lose valuable classroom space, equipment, and time in the transition period to a new building. Parents and teachers will be affected by the disrupted schedule of the students.

A number of options are available to the school administrator who is interested in combating vandalism.

## Build for Safety and Security

- Don't construct sidewalks too close to walls.
- Make sure windows are high enough to discourage intruders.
- Don't supply would-be vandals with ammunition by filling driveways and parking lots with stones or gravel.
- Be aware that short and flat roofs invite vandals to search for an entrance from the top of the school.
- Don't plant shrubbery so close to the building that it may be used as a ladder to reach windows or the roof.

## Prevention Rather Than Cure

- Draw as many people as possible into the building after school hours. People inside the building can't be outside vandalizing it, and activity inside deters vandals outside.
- Involve community organizations and individuals in the school. Ownership of a building guards against efforts to deface it.
- Make the school a center of community activity rather than merely a place of learning.

## Electrical and Mechanical Devices

Various electrical and mechanical devices have been developed to combat vandalism. Remember, however, that no matter how effective these mechanisms may be, they do nothing to alleviate problems that occur when damage is done.

- Audio-detection units use hidden microphones to guard a room, corridor, or stairwell.
- Motion-detection systems are sensitive to sound and may detect "silent" intruders.
- Electromechanical systems use wire or switches on windows, doors, mats, rugs, or drawers. When these objects are properly wired, tampering with them causes an alarm to sound.
- Photoelectric systems react to anything that may interfere with a beam of light. These beams may be aimed anywhere.
- Vibration detectors are unobtrusive mechanisms that signal alarms when something moves that shouldn't. These are small mechanisms and may be glued, screwed, or nailed anywhere.
- Radar can be used to detect possible vandals.
- Electronic force, when used for detection, can be deceiving. It looks like a wire but will trigger alarms if anything comes within three feet of it.
- Television may be used to monitor areas of a

building. Activities may be viewed live or taped for viewing later.

## Preventive and Punitive Strategies

- Replace glass windows with fiberglass, acrylic glazing, or plastic polycarbonate glazing.
- Institute a policy of restitution. Vandals may be required to pay for damages or devote some time to cleaning up the campus.
- Employ security staff to monitor grounds.
- Use guard dogs inside and outside buildings.
- Install door chains.
- Use extensive exterior lighting.
- Have teachers keep valuable articles away from windows and out of sight.
- Ask teachers to place noise-making articles next to windows.
- Involve the community in the construction of new buildings on campus.
- Identify potential vandals and provide them with counseling.
- Improve the school's image. Students who are proud of their school won't vandalize it.

## School or Fortress?

Reactive and active vandalism control measures are being used in our schools today. Both measures have elicited positive and negative results. For those administrators who rely completely on reactive control, the only real solution lies in school design. Is it possible to build maximum security in schools without changing them into fortresses? Whether or not schools can be constructed in this manner remains to be seen.

For those who rely totally on active measures, problems also result. It is questionable that every potential vandal can be identified.

Certainly, it seems that a combination of active and reactive security measures would render a solution to the problem of school vandalism. Emphasis on particular measures should depend on individual situations. If such measures do not prove to be adequate, perhaps a school resembling a fortress is better than no school at all.

Or is it?

*Written by James H. VanSciver, principal at Pocomoke High School in Worcester County, Md., and Joseph F. Marcoline, principal of Elderton (Pa.) Jr.-Sr. High School.*

## Problems vs. Symptoms

Human beings do not destroy what is important in their lives. Therefore, we must look to the sociological implications of vandalism. For those who are bent on the destruction of school property, school is not an institution that belongs to them, or a place for their needs to be met. Herein lies the logic: If the property neither belongs to me, nor does me any good, and if the property is even a source of pain to me, no one should be surprised by my anger against that property.

Students who cannot read, who are slow at learning, who are too fast at learning, who are hassled by teachers, who are not known by teachers, all have good reason to be angry with a system that frustrates them.

Again, vandalism is simply a demonstration of anger against a system. However, vandalism is only one of many symptoms of an underlying problem. Student and teacher absenteeism, verbal and physical abuse of teachers and students, community reaction against the teaching profession cry just as loudly for some problem resolution as does the more visible, more costly, vandalism.

The problem in secondary public education today is that the school curriculum and the instructional methods used to bring about that course of study are in no way tailored to meet the individual needs of students. For the most part, secondary schools have become bureaucratic centers for the dissemination of facts, rendering the human, individual, personal treatment of its patrons impossible. Until educators, school board members, and citizens face this problem, communities will be forced to ride the merry-go-round of symptom alleviation.

*Timothy F. Brown, "Improving School Climate—The Symptom vs. the Problem," May 1984* NASSP Bulletin.



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# How To Communicate Effectively With Staff Members

Have these things ever happened to you?

—You call a meeting to inform staff members about a new directive from the central office. Your explanation is clear—or so you think—but the questions from staff members indicate the opposite.

—You ask Viola Willow, a department head, to suggest the names of several teachers for a special staff development series being organized by the central office. You wait and wait, and finally summon her to your office. She reminds you that she asked you to consider an alternative approach that she's been working on with other staff. You forgot; you're embarrassed.

—Following a required evaluation visit to Fred Smith's classroom, you offer several suggestions for reducing student distractions. Smith's classroom is equally chaotic on your next visit, and he appears to be ignoring your suggestions. You repeat them, but you feel he's not listening.

—You announce a new open-door policy and encourage staff members to share good *and* bad news with you. Few come; even fewer level with you about their problems.

If you have failed to get the results you expected in situations such as these, you might conclude, rightfully, that something is wrong. That something could be your communications skills.

## What Can You Do?

First, it's necessary to understand the not-so-fine line that separates effective from ineffective communicators. You could fall into the latter category if you define communications as "telling people what you think."

Those who communicate successfully would more likely follow the definition provided by Lester R. Bittel in *What Every Supervisor Should Know.* He says communications is "the process in human relations of passing information and understanding from one person to another."

Simply passing out information isn't good enough. Yet, the experts say, most bosses are most familiar and comfortable with a one-way process of sending out information.

To improve communications to the extent that listeners actually stay tuned in to your message *and* act upon it, you have to change the process. You must not only talk, but listen to employees and provide channels for them to relate their needs, desires, reactions, and problems.

Some experts boil communications down to these essentials: prepare a clear message, send it, make sure it is received, make sure it is understood.

## Where Do You Start?

Perhaps the golden rule of communications should be this: Listen to other persons the way you want them to listen to you—with full attention, without jumping to conclusions, without interrupting, with courtesy.

If you can't wait for another person to finish what he or she has to say, you're probably missing a lot that could help you communicate better.

Take, again, the case of Fred Smith. If you constantly interrupt during Smith's explanation of why he hasn't followed your suggestions, he may give up trying to tell you anything.

If you announce an open-door policy, but employees find out that the only news you want to hear is "good" news, that may be all you will hear. They won't stop in to talk over problems that might upset you.

Experts offer these tips for improving your listening skills:

- Listen for the main ideas; don't get lost in the details or distracted by sub-points.
- Make the speaker feel comfortable. A teacher may feel more at ease during a post-evaluation conference in his or her own classroom than in your office.
- Don't assume anything. Wait for the other person to finish before drawing conclusions.
- Ask relevant and clarifying questions (e.g., "Are you saying that...").
- Straighten out any facts you know to be wrong, but do so without gloating.
- Once a meeting is started, don't take or place phone calls (except in an emergency), see other visitors, or finish work on your desk.
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand what the other person is saying.

### A Word from the Wise

Your actions are, of course, much more important than what you say or how you say it. As Mark Twain observed: "Thunder is good, thunder is impressive; but it is lightning that does the work."

What if you are a good listener, but the person you are talking with is not? Make sure you state your message directly and in a short-winded way.

## Are You Getting Through?

You can be sure you're getting through by using old classroom tricks:

- Watch for give-away looks: puzzlement, distress, blank stares.
- Encourage questions.
- Have the other person repeat or rephrase what you've said.

You will, of course, have to tailor your approach to the person with whom you are talking. If you know that certain words will make a person see red, don't use them—unless you are ready for fireworks.

**Be honest.** If you make 180 degree turns in what you tell employees from one day to the next, they'll turn you off. If you change your mind on something, admit it. You could say, "Did I say that yesterday? I was wrong yesterday, and I don't mind saying it. I've had a chance to think it over."

**Stick to the facts.** Suppose a dependable, hard-working teacher asks for time off. You'd like to grant the request, but doing so will probably bring forth charges of favoritism from other employees. What do you do?

One management expert suggests that you say something like this: "Let's look at the contract and see what it says about this matter." That's much better, he says, than blurting out, "You should know better than to ask me that; you know I can't let you do it."

In stressful situations, try to keep your tone objective, not emotional. Otherwise, the other person may note your pitch and intensity, but not your words. Be mindful that you can put another person on his or her guard by the way you say, "I want to talk with you."

In general, you've probably communicated well if employees follow through on your directions or suggestions.

## Why Do Misunderstandings Occur?

In *Communication for Supervisors and Managers,* Lyle Sussman and Paul D. Krivonos say persons with the best intentions can, nevertheless, misunderstand each other when:

- Messages are overgeneralized.
- Jargon or abstract terms are used.
- Messages contain conclusions that are based on limited information or data.
- At least one party isn't listening.
- Messages intentionally or unintentionally "obfuscate" meaning. "Using $50 words like obfuscate can make us feel educated and intellectual," Sussman and Krivonos say, "but unless your receivers know the $50 words, they may confuse obfuscate with some other word."

## Should You Talk It Over or Write It Down?

There's no definite answer to that question. Sometimes oral communication is best; with some individuals and groups and in some circumstances, written communication is best.

Both may be needed as reinforcers, one for the other. You would use both forms of communication, for example, if your high school adopted new graduation requirements. You would need to distribute a statement of the requirements and also explain them verbally to staff, students, and parents.

Similarly, in conducting a post-evaluation conference with a teacher, you will want to talk over improvement targets before putting them in writing for further reference.

Oral messages are preferable, according to Sussman and Krivonos, if time is important, feedback is crucial, or your message must result in acceptance.

If the receiver of the message is expected to be held accountable for performance, then a written message is superior to an oral one.

"Relying too heavily on the written word can be disastrous, as can be the requirement to 'put it in writing,' " says Walter St. John in *Personnel Journal.* He believes that communicating face-to-face is usually best.

Two additional tips from Sussman and Krivonos may be helpful:

**Bulletin boards.** If you use a bulletin board to communicate with staff, you should decide if all kinds of messages can be put there. If so, people may or may not read it. If you allow only important messages to appear, they will be read.

**Lengthy documents.** If you must communicate a lot of information at one time, summarize it. Tell readers they can inspect the lengthy explanations at their leisure.

*Written by Shirley Boes Neill*

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# How To Conduct the Evaluation Process

Dismissing an employee for incompetence or other unsatisfactory behavior or performance is one of the most difficult management tasks administrators face.

For most, it boils down to a basic "fear of firing." While some principals simply try to avoid confrontation of any kind, others develop this fear after a few unsuccessful attempts.

Almost every principal who considers firing an employee faces the specter of lengthy administrative hearings and even a courtroom battle. Mistakes in following due process procedures or failure to support charges with the right paperwork can cause a principal to lose a termination case and may even blemish his or her own record as an administrator.

## Avoiding the Major Pitfall

Too many principals think that maintaining a file on an unsatisfactory teacher is the best way to generate evidence for dismissal.

They fill a manila folder marked "CONFIDENTIAL" with notes, memoranda, and occasional copies of complaints or poorly prepared lesson plans. They hoard the contents of the file until they finally decide that they have had enough. Then they assemble their assortment of papers into a written justification for an evaluation of unsatisfactory performance and termination.

This "surprise" approach to adverse actions invariably leads to strong resistance and often litigation.

Why? The element of prior notice is lacking. While the teacher may have assumed that "The principal doesn't like me," or felt that "Things weren't going right," the sudden escalation of implied dissatisfaction into open adverse action will probably trigger a valid reaction of "You're just out to get me."

The best way to avoid this accusation is to bring problems out into the open as early as possible. If a teacher *knows* that you think there are problems and that you are going to act if those problems are not solved, you will probably meet less resistance in the final stages of the employer-employee relationship.

The whole process of performance evaluation should be conducted with the full knowledge and involvement of employees. The teacher should be fully informed of any negative appraisals by his or her superior, should have an opportunity to discuss the problems, and should receive guidance toward solutions.

Some principals who keep confidential files on unsatisfactory teachers are unsure about what they can put in the file.

The answer is actually quite simple. Don't put anything in the file that you wouldn't want the teacher to see. An even better solution is to share with the employee what goes in the file *before* it is filed.

## Evaluation: Step-by-Step

The following steps should be included in your evaluation process. Leaving out one of these basic ingredients could leave a weak link in your chain of due process:

- Have a *written evaluation system* that states how it will be applied. Make your standards for performance specific and give examples.
- Identify areas in which performance will be judged as objectively as possible. Don't say "a teacher will be expected to use good classroom technique." List the major elements: management of discipline and respect for both teacher and student; good planning and orderly presentation of subject matter; and strict adherence to grading and testing policy, including recording, daily grades, tests, and other progress indicators in the grade book.
- Specify the level of performance that is expected in each area of evaluation. If a policy requires that a minimum number of grades be placed in a teacher's grade book, spell it out. For example: "A teacher must have at least three daily grades, two grades for written work, and one test grade for each student entered in the grade book every week."
- Schedule regular evaluation conferences with all employees. Don't just concentrate on the ones you consider "bad apples."
- Never try to motivate a teacher by giving an undeserved good rating in an area where the

teacher is weak. Be fair and honest.

- If a particular deficiency continues, don't ignore it in subsequent evaluations. If a problem isn't getting better, note that fact in the evaluation and re-emphasize your suggestions for improvement.
- Be consistent. The perception by employees that the evaluation process is *fair*, even if they don't always agree with the results, can give credibility to eventual decisions for adverse action.

## Put It in Writing

Unfortunately, there are no "fill-in-the-blanks" evaluation forms that provide an adequate basis for termination. If serious problems with an employee may lead to dismissal, you need to supplement the evaluation form and conference with a *summary letter* to the employee.

Summary letters are probably the most important documents in a termination file, and can make or break an adverse action proceeding.

The letter should detail the areas covered, the weaknesses noted, and the suggestions and directives given to the teacher.

Always be sure that the teacher acknowledges having received the letter. Ask him or her to sign a dated copy marked "I Have Received and Read This Letter."

If deficiencies continue (or if new problems arise), hold another conference and write another letter. Keep the tone of each letter the same: businesslike, objective, factual, and aimed at obtaining compliance with policy and improving performance.

After you have held several conferences and sent several letters, the employee should be forewarned that his or her work is unsatisfactory. You have tried to inform the teacher that his or her performance is not up to standards and, at the same time, you have established a solid record if the employee challenges an adverse action.

If the evaluation conference letters show a consistent pattern of repeated warnings and failure to comply with directives during a year or two (depending on the employee's tenure in the system), you have built a good case for an adverse action.

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*Written by David Splitt, an attorney in private practice in Washington, D.C., and a former high school teacher. He served as general counsel to the District of Columbia Board of Education from 1974 to 1979, and now writes a regular monthly column, "School Law," for* The Executive Educator.

*Contributing Editor: Lu Fulbright*

### Sample Summary Letter

Last week we met to discuss my observations of your classes and my evaluation of your teaching performance over the last semester. I pointed out that you had several serious problems meeting instructional and non-instructional requirements. You explained that some problems were caused by your conflicting time commitments. The following are my specific directives for improvement:

1. *Lesson Plans*—When you joined the faculty, you received a copy of the *Faculty Handbook*, which included a requirement for submitting copies of lesson plans each Friday for the following week.

On a number of occasions you have not handed in plans until the Tuesday or Wednesday after they were due. You turned in no plans for the first week in November and the second week of December. On each of those occasions, I spoke to you about the deficiency and you promised to be more prompt. I reminded you that school policy requires that the plans be filed in the school office by 3:30 p.m. every Friday.

2. *Class Grades*—At the end of the first fall grading period, your report cards were not ready. At that time, we had an informal conference and you explained that you had been unable to complete the reports because you had an exam in your night class. I also pointed out to you that, during my classroom observations, I noticed that you handed papers back to students without grades or written comments. You stated that you did not have sufficient time to thoroughly read the papers, so you returned them ungraded.

I advised you of the importance of checking student work and providing feedback to them. You agreed that this was an important part of teaching, and stated that you would improve your time management and complete grading all of your students' papers.

While your classroom rapport with students is good, there is room for a lot of improvement in your organization of classwork. Adequate lesson planning and providing sufficient time for grading papers and evaluating students are important, and you need to improve significantly in these areas.

If you disagree with any of the conclusions or facts stated in this letter, or if you have any questions about these directives or suggestions, please advise me in writing by the end of next week so that we can have another meeting to discuss any differences.

Tips for Principals *is an occasional publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091. John E. Boie, President; Scott D. Thomson, Executive Director; Thomas F. Koerner, Editor; Carol Bruce, Associate Editor.*

# How To Develop an Effective Homework Program

## *Policies and Guidelines*

Given the importance of homework in the lives of students, school administrators must give it as much consideration as any other aspect of instruction or curriculum.

And, just as other aspects of the school curriculum have policies and guidelines, so should the homework program. Before these guidelines can be established, some questions must be asked.

There is no ideal time allocation for homework, but a policy should address:

- The amount of homework assigned by each teacher to each student. A daily 45-minute homework assignment for a particular class may seem reasonable unless a student receives a similar assignment each day from six other teachers.
- The amount of time available during the school day for students to work on homework.

A homework policy should establish time parameters for teachers and students regarding homework requirements. These parameters should be set in relation to the importance the faculty members assign to homework and the purposes they believe it should serve.

How should homework be graded or assessed? How should it be reflected in student grades?

Research has shown that teachers in the same school differ in how they assess individual assignments and how much homework contributes to student grades. Although some differences may be expected based on the nature of the subject taught, a policy or guidelines should be established to provide a basic framework for teachers.

Merely checking homework to see if students did it all, without checking the accuracy or quality of the work, has some serious drawbacks. It conveys to the students that the teacher is not really serious about homework and that it is intended more as busy work than as a learning experience. When homework is not checked for accuracy or quality and students are not given any feedback on their work, learning cannot be positively reinforced. Indeed, students may assume that poor quality work is acceptable.

However, not every assignment must be graded. Nor does all the checking have to be done by the teacher. With adequate information or guidelines, students can self-check many assignments; others might be checked by classmates. If the assignment is worth doing, it is worth some type of feedback.

Whether and how much homework should contribute or affect student grades is a question with no definite answer. If a teacher develops quality assignments that accurately reflect what the students know about a subject, and if these assignments are appropriately evaluated, they may justifiably contribute to grades. On the other hand, poor assignments or those not evaluated at all should not be considered.

Certainly homework should not be used as a means for inflating grades. Extremely easy or frivolous assignments made to guarantee student success and boost their grades should not be considered. At the same time, teachers should not refrain from lowering grades if students fail to complete legitimate homework assignments. Nor should they stop giving homework because students do not do it. Instead, they should look at the types of homework they assign and consider whether students believe the assignments are worthwhile or are simply busy work. Lower expectations will result in lower performance.

Many states or districts require that administrators regularly and systematically evaluate teachers' instructional methods, and that evaluation should include homework practices.

Each teacher should prepare a written description of homework practices for the principal. This description should address the issues presented above, plus any others that are a part of the school's homework policy. From these descriptions, the principal can determine if a teacher understands the school policy.

At a time when schools are pressured to improve, homework should not be allowed to persist as a relic of the past. There must be a deliberate, thoughtful decision about the purposes of homework and the faculty members and administrators must ensure those purposes are fulfilled in a way that best serves the educational needs of students.

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*This section was written by William Rutherford, associate professor in the college of education at the University of Texas at Austin.*

## *Defining the Purpose of Homework*

When it comes to homework assignments, teachers often confuse students by trying to have more than one purpose per assignment. Teachers must vary the types of homework assigned (Palardy, 1988), but they should still maintain a structure in homework assignments.

There are four general types of homework: preparation, practice, extension, and creativity (Lee and Pruitt, 1979). Each type has its own purpose. Teachers should make their homework assignments with one of those purposes in mind.

The following examples of preparation, practice, extension, and creative homework were made by K-12 teachers in a summer seminar (Foyle, 1988). Their suggestions should help administrators to help teachers not only vary homework assignments, but also focus on each type of assignment.

**Preparation homework** (getting ready before) helps students inform themselves about the next day's lesson. For example, a section of pages may be assigned prior to a social studies discussion. Then, students may be asked to:

- Write their own class discussion questions based on their reading
- Share materials brought from home that relate to the class lesson
- Complete a take-home open-book pretest that covers material from the upcoming lessons
- Bring magazine and newspaper articles about the next topic of study. These materials could then be used on a bulletin board.

**Practice homework** (doing again after) provides students with the needed review and reinforcement about material presented in a previous lesson. For example:

- After a grammar lesson, students write their own sentences and then label the various elements of these sentences
- After reading a story, students write a new logical ending to the story and explain why the ending is appropriate
- After studying a specific period of recent history, students ask their parents about their experiences, reactions to that time period
- After studying nutrition, students read the labels on a variety of foods at home and report their findings with regard to the fat content, salt, calories, etc.

**Extension homework** (going beyond) guides students so they expand on concepts that were taught in class. Various approaches to extension homework include:

- After studying a historical period, students write want ads for the newspaper of that time
- After reading a story written during a past period of time, students rewrite the story using modern English and a modern telling of the story's themes
- After studying a topic, students read an article or book about that topic and report findings to the class.

**Creative homework** (putting together) includes analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This type of homework is inventive and resourceful. Students come up with their own ideas related to a class topic and then share those ideas with the class.

Several suggested creative homework ideas include the following. Students:

- Create a new invention that they would like to see made
- Create a comic strip that incorporates the lesson topic
- Make miniature buildings that reflect the architecture of specific time periods
- Formulate a new product that fills a human need and develop an advertising campaign for the product.

Teachers no longer need to feel like they are heading in all directions with their homework assignments. Administrators should provide some specific examples of the four types of homework and their purposes, and teachers should think about what the purpose of specific homework is before they assign it.

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*This section was written by Harvey C. Foyle, professor in the college of education at Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas.*

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# How To Develop an Effective School Communications Crisis Plan

A principal can be faced with a school crisis at any time, and as NASA, Johnson & Johnson, and Union Carbide can attest, it pays to have a communications crisis plan (CP).

With such a plan in place, information will be managed more effectively and, consequently, the crisis will be managed more effectively.

The CP should anticipate events that might occur during an emergency and establish a course of action for gathering and distributing information during the crisis.

A crisis takes on many shapes and hits with various degrees of severity. Possible crises to consider preparing for are:

- Explosions on site (boilers, science equipment)
- Terrorist activities (bomb or hostage situations)
- Student walkouts and protests
- Teacher strikes with active picketing and malicious campaigns
- Fire with injury and excessive damage
- Natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornadoes, and danger from volcanic lava
- Student suicides or other student deaths
- School bus accidents

## Before a Crisis Occurs

The best time for the administrator to prepare a CP is before a crisis occurs, when the school is operating normally. To do this, the administrator can:

- Conduct an inventory of the school's vulnerabilities to identify potential problem areas and people who might be affected
- Review how other organizations have dealt with these or similar catastrophes and examine communications specialists' recommendations for dealing with crisis situations
- Write a comprehensive communications contingency plan that details who to contact, what to do, where, and how
- Establish an information clearance and review procedure and designate staff members to coordinate the information clearinghouse or crisis communication center
- Prepare a list of equipment needed to communicate during a crisis, including cameras, photocopier, walkie-talkies, extra typewriters, and, in case the electricity is off, a battery-driven portable microphone, bullhorn, and powerful whistle
- Designate "security personnel" to control access to crisis areas and keep order within them
- Distribute copies of the CP to all personnel at a group orientation, maintaining extra copies for later use as needed
- Review the plan periodically and establish contingency plans in preparation for the worst possible situations
- Simulate crisis situations to try out CP and adjust accordingly
- Develop preemptive programs to avoid crises.

The communications crisis plan should be widely circulated and discussed, and copies should be distributed to all employees.

The CP should be reviewed with staff members periodically; special orientation sessions should be held for all new employees. The CP should also be shared with appropriate district level personnel and government agencies—especially the fire and police departments.

To permit updating, the communications crisis plan should be carefully indexed and inserted in a loose-leaf binder. It is a good idea for the administrator to keep the CP outline on a card in his or her wallet so it will always be readily available.

**Designating a Spokesperson.** A single spokesperson should be designated to speak for the entire school during a crisis. Separate spokespersons making contradictory statements can lead to disaster.

Sometimes conditions warrant having the superintendent or principal as spokesperson; other times, a communications or public relations specialist is better qualified because of special training in dealing with the news media, rumor control, etc.

Regardless of who serves as spokesperson, he or she must be well-informed, able to express himself or herself well, have credibility and clout, have access to the most accurate and up-to-date information and completely understand what he or she is and isn't authorized to say.

This simple guideline is often prescribed for crisis spokespersons: State the location, date of incident, type of happening, cause, and persons involved.

**Dealing with the Media.** Because a crisis at the school involves not only students and school employees, but also community members, any critical situation there will draw media attention. Prepare to deal with the news media by:

- Compiling a list of names, phone numbers, and addresses of media representatives and having a stack of addressed envelopes

- Developing a fact sheet about the district and school for use as a handout
- Maintaining an adequate supply of news release forms and news releases that provide background information in order to justify the school's position in regard to the crisis
- Identifying suitable facilities where media representatives can work and hold news conferences.

## During a Crisis

During a crisis, the following may serve as basic guidelines:

- Attempt to define the type and extent of the crisis as soon as possible
- Inform employees what is happening as soon as possible
- Designate that a central source such as the crisis communications center coordinate information gathering and dissemination
- Instruct employees to refer all information and questions to communications centers
- Remind employees that only designated spokespersons are authorized to talk with news media
- Take initiative with news media and let them know what is or is not known about the situation
- Remember to observe these guidelines when communicating: maintain a unified position and uniform message; keep messages concise, clear, and consistent; keep spokespersons and alternates briefed; tailor the message to each target group, being accurate but sensitive
- Contact the top administrator or designee to inform him or her of the current situation and emerging developments and to clear statements
- Delay releasing information until facts are verified and the school's position about the crisis is clear
- Read all releases from previously prepared and approved statements to avoid the dangers of ad-libbing. Assign sufficient staff members to handle phones and to seek additional information
- Keep a complete log of all incoming and outgoing calls and personal contacts
- Provide refreshments for employees and news media representatives if the crisis is prolonged
- Relieve key people from their normal duties so they may focus on the crisis
- Express appreciation to all persons who helped handle the crisis

**Target Groups To Contact.** Two groups should know about any crisis right away: the persons affected by the crisis and the persons needed to take corrective action.

Naturally, these groups vary according to the nature of the crisis, and the information provided to them should be tailored to their role in the crisis. Priority should be given to informing the following groups as soon as possible:

- Fire, police, hospitals, and ambulance units
- Key government officials
- Service agencies such as gas and electric companies if they are affected
- Superintendent and school board chairperson
- Employees
- Families of people involved
- News media
- Local religious leaders.

Information should be shared as soon as possible, as rumors and incorrect information spread amazingly quickly. If there is undue delay, and if the public suspects a cover-up, the resultant mistrust may destroy credibility. It is a good idea to schedule regular briefings to update the media and to reassure employees.

Naturally, the type of crisis should determine the methods used to convey messages. Usually a combination of techniques is most effective, including news releases, mailgrams, phone calls, group briefings, and hotlines for rumor control.

As soon as the crisis occurs, and before any details are known, the spokesperson should make an immediate statement to:

- Indicate that school officials are aware of and on top of the situation
- Assure that details are being investigated
- Assure all interested persons that all appropriate information will be shared as soon as possible.

If you can't discuss something, explain why; "No comment" is a red flag to news media.

After the crisis is over, issue a final statement explaining the actual causes and how the problem will be avoided in the future.

## What Not To Do

1. Don't panic
2. Don't lie or be perceived as covering up
3. Don't overreact or exaggerate the situation, but don't refuse to acknowledge its gravity either
4. Don't try to avoid blame by using a scapegoat
5. Don't argue with media representatives
6. Don't deviate from communications policy and agreed-upon statements
7. Don't bluff, ad-lib, or talk "off the record"
8. Don't delay sharing what information you have, but make sure you are sharing facts
9. Don't project a primary interest in protecting the school's reputation at all cost

A crisis is unpredictable. The only safe course is to be adequately prepared. Effective communications crisis planning is essential and will determine how well you survive the crisis.

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# How To Establish Effective Staff Development Programs

More than half of the 50 states now mandate staff development in their public schools. When budgeted and "hidden" expenses are considered, staff development efforts are estimated to cost from $1,000 to $1,700 per teacher annually.

Any component of education that costs this much and affects the professional life of every teacher must be planned and delivered with the clear intent that it have a positive impact on the school and those it serves.

Staff development can be justified only if its ultimate goal is to improve education for students. To arrive at this end, a variety of intermediate goals might be reached.

Improving teacher performance in the delivery of instruction or classroom management or increasing their subject area knowledge are appropriate, as are efforts to improve the curriculum or to modify and strengthen the school as an organization. These and many other intermediate goals are justifiable as long as they are intended to contribute to the one primary goal of a better education for students.

Staff development is not always the means to correct problems or remedy deficiencies. It may well serve to improve something that is already good.

## What Is Staff Development?

Any effort to improve the professional performance of school staff members might be classified as staff development. All too often, staff development is thought of only as structured sessions such as faculty meetings or workshops where information is delivered to a group of teachers.

Research has shown that traditional training workshops result in very little change in teacher practice unless they are followed up with one-to-one coaching in the teacher's classroom. Because this traditional approach has lacked effectiveness, more attention should be directed at other ways for delivering staff development. Some possible options are discussed below. No doubt some of these options are already being employed; others could be introduced into a school without too much difficulty.

## Staff Development Activities

- **Teacher Assessment:** An increasing number of states and school districts employ a formal procedure for assessing the teaching and professional performance of individual teachers. When teachers receive constructive feedback on their performance, along with specific suggestions for improvement or enrichment and follow-up assistance, this is a powerful staff development experience.
- **Teaching Buddies:** Two or three teachers join together to share with and support each other. This could include shared planning, joint development of teaching materials and techniques, and teaching observations with feedback.
- **Mentoring:** Usually thought of when experienced teachers guide a new teacher, this one-to-one relationship need not be so limited. Experienced administrators or department heads can guide new staff members, and experienced teachers can help other experienced teachers in weak areas or when they are trying to implement a new practice or procedure.
- **Share Fairs:** Suppose members of the English department are seeking ways to improve the writing performance of their students. All members of the department could spend some weeks searching for ideas that would promote better writing skills. These ideas would then be shared with the entire department. Logically, this would be followed by a consensus selection of the new ideas to be tried. Before this step is taken the teachers may want to do some classroom research.
- **Classroom Research:** Teachers should be encouraged (and supported) to try new teaching procedures or materials and to examine what effects they have. In the situation discussed above, the English department members would try some of the new ideas and report on their outcomes before a decision was made about which new techniques would be used.
- **Curriculum Analysis:** Individually or collectively teachers might analyze the curriculum they are using or proposing to use. This analysis might focus on issues such as content omissions or excessive repetitions, difficulty of materials, skills taught and not taught, sequencing, teaching requirements, and interest level for students.
- **Teaching Analysis:** Using videotapes of actual teaching episodes, small groups of teachers (perhaps Teaching Buddies) can focus on one teaching skill at a time and analyze the tape for that skill. Videotapes may be those

that are commercially prepared or made in the school. Before the analysis process begins the teachers should spend some time reviewing the literature to identify those teaching skills that have been found to have the strongest relationship to effective teaching.

Visiting other classrooms or other schools, participating in long-term training workshops or classes, developing and delivering training to others, and developing innovative practices are other ways that teachers might engage in professional development.

## The Role of Administrators

Ultimate responsibility for an effective staff development program in a school rests with the school administrators. This does not mean administrators must design or deliver the staff development. Ideally, teachers and administrators will work together to develop the program. A good program will include a variety of activities and procedures that utilize the skills and talents of many people.

While there could and should be flexibility in the planning and implementation of a staff development program, three administrator responsibilities remain constant:

- First, administrators must ensure that the school does have a well-planned program that will address identified needs.
- Once developed, the program must be implemented if it is to have any effect.
- Finally, it is important that development programs be evaluated to determine their effectiveness.

A first step in the planning of a staff development effort is the identification of needs. Administrators must guide the process of identifying those needs that are most essential for enhancing the education of students. This can be a difficult task, for it may require that staff members reorder their priorities or consider needs they had not even identified.

For example, suppose the mathematics department wants to develop several computer courses for advanced students and their priority is to get training in computers for members of that department. At the same time, data reveal that achievement test scores in mathematics have been dropping over the past three years and fewer students are taking courses in the department that are not required.

In this situation, school administrators may determine that staff development efforts should focus on improving instruction in courses that are currently taught rather than developing new courses.

The matter of teacher choice versus organizational needs in staff development experiences can be a sensitive issue, but it must not be ignored. When a school has a carefully planned, needs-based staff development program, teachers should be expected to participate in development activities that are directly related to program priorities.

Once the program priorities have been established and the planning completed, the next responsibility of administrators is to facilitate the program. A well-planned program that is not implemented or is poorly implemented is of little value. Arranging schedules and resources so the program can evolve as planned is essential. Teachers should share in this responsibility, but administrators must be sure the program does not "slip through the cracks."

All too often there is no evaluation of staff development efforts or it is done through the use of a simple rating scale that assesses people's feelings about the effort. This type of evaluation (or non-evaluation) is not acceptable.

A good evaluation process has short-term and long-term objectives. On the short-term there should be a determination if the planned activities actually occurred and if they had the intended outcomes. These short-term objectives will usually target changes in teacher behaviors, the school as an organization, or the curriculum.

If the short-term objectives are accomplished, it is time to determine if those changes led to attainment of the long-term objectives. The long-term objectives should focus on improvement in student performance or behavior. In this evaluation process it is important to recognize that unless or until the short-term objectives have been met, there is no reason to believe there will be any long-term effects.

Staff development occurs in every school. Whether it will be a meaningful or meaningless endeavor depends on how it is handled by local school administrators.

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# How To Evaluate a School's Cocurricular Activities Program

Have you ever been asked to provide information concerning the effectiveness of the cocurricular activities program or a specific student activity?

If so, you know the difficulty of doing so on other than a subjective basis or on "gut level" feelings.

The national and state reports examining education and the economic problems creating stress on financial resources in many districts have prompted more questions about the cocurricular activities program and its effectiveness.

The overall cocurricular activities program and each of the component activities should be involved in an ongoing evaluation and should be evaluated each year to ascertain effectiveness and to identify areas that need improvement.

Administrators are responsible for making sure that the cocurricular activities program is evaluated, although they may not actually conduct the evaluation.

A wise principal will involve the advisers, students, and, in some cases, parents and community members in the evaluation process.

## What Kind of Evaluation Is Needed?

The evaluation process should involve both formative and summative program evaluation.

Formative evaluation is the assessment of a program that is carried out during the time that a creative process is underway. The purpose is to keep the development in line with the intended purposes stated at the time the program was undertaken.

Formative evaluation is usually carried out by an individual in the program and the results are for internal use only.

Summative evaluation is an assessment of a program that is carried out at the completion of the systematic effort or project. The purpose of summative evaluation is to make a judgment about the worth of an activity or program in terms of the intended (or unintended) outcomes.

## Questions in Need of Answers

What questions must the principal answer when assessing the cocurricular activities program?

1. Is the activity program based upon a clearly stated philosophy with sound learning theory and needs?
2. Are there sound policies for the student activities program and are they communicated effectively to students, parents, faculty, and community?
3. Is the overall program and each specific activity meeting its objectives and goals? What is the evidence that objectives/goals are being met?
4. What is the extent of student participation in the total program and in each activity? Are a majority of students participating in the program? What is the evidence in regard to degree of student participation?
5. What kinds of students are participating in the program?
6. Do some students participate too much in the student cocurricular program?
7. Is the cocurricular program well-balanced and comprehensive, or do some activities dominate the program? Are any student interests and needs inadequately met by the program?
8. Is the total program and each of the activities well organized and efficiently run?
9. Are all aspects of the program supported sufficiently in terms of availability of facilities, funds, school time, advisers/personnel, and recognition? Or are some activities disproportionately supported?
10. Are there suitable facilities to safely conduct the activities provided?
11. Is there a qualified adviser(s) for the activity who is willing to assume leadership and responsibility to provide a meaningful experience for students?
12. Is there a reward structure to compensate advisers for their time and effort?
13. Are costs to students that are associated with the activity reasonable or prohibitive to the point where they exclude some students from participating?

## Who Should Be Involved in the Evaluation?

Since evaluation is a continuous process, be sure that you seek feedback from a wide audience whose members can be honest and objective. The same individuals or groups do not need to be involved in all areas of evaluation. You must decide which people or groups can best provide the evaluation needed. Typically, the following groups or individuals are asked to evaluate:

- Student members of each organization/activity
- Advisers or sponsors
- Faculty members
- School administrators
- Parents

- Students
- Community members
- Group or activity leaders.

## Techniques and Evaluation Instruments

A number of techniques may be used to evaluate the program. No matter which method or technique is used, it should be relatively uncomplicated and not too time-consuming. Keep it simple and to the point. Some techniques or instruments that have been used for evaluation are:

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Response checklists
- Progress reports
- Observation forms and reports
- Group discussions
- Descriptive reports
- School newspaper surveys
- Outside observer at meetings/committees
- Suggestion box
- Community comments
- Random telephone surveys
- Open meetings
- Individual member self-evaluations
- Random surveys of students
- Faculty surveys or interviews.

Each of the groups in the cocurricular activities program should be required to prepare an end-of-the-year written report to be disseminated to all appropriate parties. It should be developed cooperatively by members and the adviser(s), and should include:

- Information on the goals/objectives and evidence of how they were met
- Major accomplishments
- Number of students who participated
- Names of officers and adviser(s)
- List of members and grade levels
- Meeting schedule--dates, time, location
- Membership requirements
- Financial report
- Projects conducted and their evaluation
- Summaries of evaluation conducted by the organization
- Membership dues and student fees for equipment, clothing, etc.
- Major unresolved issues and problems
- Recommendations.

## Evaluating the Data

A quick way to use the data received via the written report of each activity is to plug the data into a matrix to provide a quick overview of what is currently offered in the cocurricular program.

Enter the name of the activity, its purposes, the number of participants, costs, facilities used, name of the adviser, and revenues generated.

**Cocurricular Activity Assessment Form**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Name Of Activity (1) | |
| | Purposes (2) | |
| | Number of Participants (3) | |
| | Salaries | Costs (4) |
| | Supplies | |
| | Other | |
| | Total | |
| | Facilities (5) | |
| | Adviser(s) (6) | |
| | Dues/Fees | Revenue (7) |
| | Admissions | |
| | Other | |
| | Total | |

After you have entered the data for each activity, you should ask the following questions:

1. Is the purpose of the activity relevant to the goals of the total cocurricular program and the total curriculum?
2. Do a large number of students benefit from the activity?
3. Do the costs of the program match the benefits received?
4. Are there adequate facilities to safely offer the activity?
5. Is there a qualified faculty adviser/sponsor?
6. What would happen if this program or activity were to drop out of sight tomorrow?

A successful evaluation provides the following:

Evolves around goals and objectives
Verifies the work of the activity and what others say is happening
Assists in self-evaluation
Leads to constructive suggestions and improvement
Utilizes many techniques or devices
Action results because of the feedback and data
Timely assessment of what is taking place is given
Involves many people
Objective because it is based on data and not guesses
Notifies others about the program

*Written by Ron Joekel, associate dean, Teachers College, and professor of curriculum and instruction, University of Nebaska, Lincoln.*

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# How To Find and Use Information Effectively

School principals constantly have to make decisions, and most of them make these decisions on the basis of information from many different sources—school and district records; conversations with colleagues, teachers, and students; past experience and observation; the opinions of parent and citizen groups; and media reports.

But, if the experts are right, administrators can make even better use of available information. In an interview for this *Tips for Principals*, one experienced research specialist put it this way: "So much information is readily available, it's crazy that principals don't make better use of it."

## Finding the 'Few Good Things'

For most school administrators, the two primary constraints to gathering and using more information are usually time and human resources, according to *Information for Decision Making*, published by the California Dept. of Education.

If you don't have much time in which to make a decision, the report noted, you are likely to draw on only the experts, advisers, and resources that are close at hand.

In addition, when you go outside your usual circle—to an educational data base, for example—the problem you may confront is not lack of information, but too much information. Experts say the dilemma confronting decisionmakers in most fields today is how to *narrow* the surfeit of information available to the few good things needed for intelligent decision making.

How do you find and then "narrow" information? Who can help you? Here are some suggestions from Jean Holbrook, director of the San Mateo Educational Resources Center, and others:

1. Before pursuing specific pieces of information, take the time to think through the problem. State it as concisely as possible.
2. Talk to a colleague about it. This will help you clarify both the problem and your information needs.
3. State in writing how you intend to use the information (e.g., to develop a staff development program in the teaching of writing for all secondary teachers). Specify what type of information you are seeking (e.g., policy statements, curriculum guidelines).
4. List the synonyms that could be used to describe what you want.
5. Determine whether you want "a few good pieces of information" or an exhaustive search.
6. Figure out who can help you. Solicit their help. Specify what you need to know, rather than what you think is the most likely source of that information. Your own school or district library is a good place to start. Some other possible sources are regional education services, local colleges and universities, the state education agency, and professional organizations.
7. If you are going to do it yourself, determine the most appropriate source. ERIC, for example, is not the place to look for the description of a local project or a recent magazine article. (There is usually a three to six-month lag between the time something is published and when it shows up in ERIC.)
8. Anticipate your information needs. Create your own mini-search center by:
   a. Keeping some basic information documents on hand.
   b. Filing the names and telephone numbers of persons who are particularly knowledgeable about specific subjects.
   c. Copying and filing noteworthy articles and other documents immediately after you read them. (Another idea here is to copy and file under appropriate headings the contents pages of the publications you read regularly.)
9. Make your ongoing information needs known to your secretary, assistants, the librarian.
10. Take a librarian or "information retrieval specialist" to lunch. Spend the time asking questions and listening, not talking.

## ERIC: The Mega-Source

The most comprehensive source of information available on educational topics is the federally funded ERIC system. Its collection of approximately 500,000 documents is accessible to educators at an estimated 3,300 locations nationwide, including colleges, private search agencies, state education departments, and intermediate education units.

More organizations are now willing to put full documents (rather than abstracts) into the system and to allow users to obtain microfiche copies.

In addition, ERIC has funded the creation of a "Practice File." Its purpose is to find and add to ERIC 1,200 of the practical kinds of documents that are of most value to administrators and teachers.

What kinds of documents? Included are curriculum ideas, articles citing the pros and cons of alternative solutions to educational problems, and policy statements from major organizations. All of these materials should be available through the regular ERIC system by spring 1984 in either microfiche or hard copy, according to Katherine Clay, the project director.

As part of the project, new sources of information are being identified, and it will be up to the 16 ERIC Clearinghouses to stay in contact with these organizations.

For principals who want to use ERIC most efficiently, the best approach is to use an intermediary—a person or agency with sophisticated knowledge of the system.

Probably the best agency in the country to do this is the San Mateo Educational Resources Center (SMERC). Under statewide contracts, it serves all educators in the states of Alaska, Florida, Hawaii, and the Virgin Islands. In addition, it has contracts to serve parts of Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington.

Other educators may contract with SMERC on an individual basis for one of the various types of search services it offers. For example, for approximately $75, you can submit a question to SMERC, and a trained research specialist will look for the answer (drawing on ERIC and other data bases as well as its own supplemental files), analyze the documents contained in a computerized printout, and forward the best of these to you in microfiche or paper form. You may also select additional documents from the printout, and request copies from SMERC.

(For more information, contact Jean Holbrook, Director, SMERC, 333 Main St., Redwood City, CA 94063; (415) 363-5450.)

Another alternative is to contact the ERIC Clearinghouse that deals with the information you need. The clearinghouses are obligated to respond to mail and phone requests for information, as well as to walk-in visitors.

Among the subject areas covered by the clearinghouses are: educational management; handicapped and gifted children; information resources; language and linguistics; reading and communication skills; rural education and small schools; science, mathematics, and environmental education; social studies; tests, measurement, and evaluation; and urban education.

## Use a Micro?

Some principals may want to use a microcomputer to access ERIC and other data bases. This is both easy and difficult, according to Charles Hoover, the head of the ERIC system.

"You can learn to get in and out of the system easily, and to at least find out how many documents there are in the system pertaining to your interest," Hoover says.

"But," he added, "I don't think that the average principal can tap the system as efficiently with a micro as he or she can by using an intermediary." Why? To find the best things—to do the narrowing that yields the best information—you have to have sophisticated knowledge of ERIC, that is, be well acquainted with its indexing system, thesaurus, and search strategies. In other words, you have to know the right "descriptors" (or terms) and how to manipulate them to get what you want.

Another consideration for the principal who is interested in using a micro to find information through a data base service is the amount of time needed to learn the system and to keep updated on changes in its operation.

As one resource specialist commented, "At this point, a 10-year-old could get 10,000 documents out of the system, but finding the 10 or so that could aid a principal in decision making takes an expert."

**Checklist: Using Information for Decision Making**

1. Have I broken down the situation into its component parts so I know which issues need further information to enhance their resolution?
2. Is this a decision for which I should gather information beyond what I already know?
3. Have I considered all the possible *sources* of information that may be useful?
4. Have I considered all potentially useful information collection *procedures* (e.g., review of existing records, interviews, formal or informal observations, testing, questionnaires)?
5. Have I considered carefully the relevance, consistency, and cost of information I have or intend to gather?
6. Have I considered how to weight the various pieces of information in making a decision?
7. Do I understand the information sufficiently to explain it to others?
8. Have I considered how to disseminate information about my decision to those who need to know?

Adapted from *Information for Decision Making.*

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*by Shirley Boes Neill*

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# How To Get the Most from Teacher Observations

Classroom observation represents a vital link among the student, teacher, and principal. It brings the principal closer to the real action, to the point of exchange, to instruction and learning. It is usually enjoyable, and informative and places the principal in a resource role in which his or her ideas can really affect teachers, students, and learning.

Teacher observation also improves administrators' delegation skills because it forces the principal to allow administrative tasks to be performed by other staff members while he or she is observing.

## Teacher Observation Strategies

● Give every staff member the option of a pre-observation conference, although the new staff members might be the only ones who show interest. The conference provides these new members with insight into the complex process and thus relieves tension. It also enables the principal to lay a groundwork of expectations for the teacher.

The pre-observation format can be as simple or complex as needed. The format used in Elizabethtown (Pa.) includes several topics of discussion: characteristics of student/class; unit objectives; background from previous lessons; lesson objectives; materials and strategies to be used; measure for student learning; the lesson's relationships to future objectives; possible alternatives for improvement; and any other pertinent topics.

Use the pre-observation conference to set the stage for the teacher and observer to share ideas about teaching and learning. Make it a positive and supportive climate. From these planned and focused beginnings can spring a tremendous opportunity for teacher growth and improvement.

● Include the assistant principals in the process by assigning them observations and asking them to provide intensive assistance for teachers in need of extra help.

● Spend a day observing a particular department, rotating each period. In some cases, you might observe a teacher twice. By the end of the day you will have completed several observations, improved your knowledge of that department, and formulated specific ideas for improvement in the department as a whole.

Provide each teacher with your usual observation report and write a one or two-page draft of your total day, describing what happened period by period, and including general comments particular to the department staff members. Include four or five suggestions, ideas, questions, or considerations for the department as a whole.

You have now established a better link with this instructional area and can offer yourself as a well-informed resource. Keep in touch with the staff members' reactions to your observations/comments. Schedule a day or half-day every week for this kind of observation.

● Make your post-observation report count. Take some time to carefully prepare your suggestions for improvement. It is better not to write down any suggestions than to come up with ones that are not meaningful and helpful.

In your post-observation conference with teachers, keep the atmosphere positive. Avoid distractions during the meeting and open the lines of communication. Remind teachers to invite you into the classroom when they think you would find a particular lesson interesting. When you do receive an invitation, be there.

But observation need not be limited to the classroom. Effective observation involves everyone in every school setting.

## General Observation Strategies

● Follow a student around the building for an entire day and interview him or her at the end of the day. In addition to observing the student, you will have the opportunity to observe six or seven teachers. Write teacher observation reports and a one or two-page report about the student, the student interview, and what happened in each class.

This strategy is also an excellent way for several teachers to do a climate study of the school. One teacher per day can shadow a student throughout the daily schedule, interview the student at the end of the day, summarize instructional strategies and patterns, and then meet with the other teachers to discuss the findings.

● Spend the first 30 to 40 minutes each morning wan-

dering around the building. Meet the substitutes, visit teachers, check out the library, lobby, or other areas that students congregate. By being out and about, you can take care of problems that might have been brought to your attention later in the day when someone "just dropped in" to discuss a situation with you.

This "walking around" concept is good at any time. Visit a few classrooms during the day, and include art, shop, physical education, library, or home economics classes.

- Find other ways and times to make observation reports. Write one about the play rehearsal, band concert, math convention, career day, or the special effort by the counselor at parent night. Use any meaningful situation to observe, record, reinforce, and feed back. Use your time effectively and generate a positive response and some new ideas.

Observation can be one of the more pleasant aspects of principals' roles. It allows them to spend more time with students—which should be a priority—and to have positive, constructive contact with teachers. Observation also improves classroom activity and instruction. And, for those occasions when you need to be critical, your new observation approach will provide you with more backgound information, time-on-task, and, ultimately, better documentation.

Instructional leadership is an important responsibility. Accept it. Enjoy it. Your time will be better spent and you will soon be far more knowledgeable about what's going on in the building and in the classroom. What's more, you will spend more time with your teachers and your students and you will gain a new perspective on your school—one beyond your office walls.

*Written by Dustin A. Peters, principal at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Area High School.*

## The Ideal/Reality Exercise

An ideal/reality exercise for teachers and students can help to create a dialog and focus attention on more effective teaching and learning. The model described here, suggested by the Coalition of Essential Schools, is used at Elizabethtown (Pa.) Area High School. It asks staff members and students to examine the differences between the ideal teaching/learning climate and reality.

*For Teachers*

Ask teachers in small groups to consider the questions: "What is happening when you feel that you are really teaching, really reaching your students? And during how much of your time in the school does that take place? What are the obstacles—in yourself, your professional peers, in how the school is organized—to a more exciting and meaningful teaching situation?"

Summarize all small group information into a consensus of the ideal, the real, and what is necessary to bridge that gap.

This is an excellent afternoon workshop. Initially, it creates a lot of concern and frustration, but it can be the start of some very exciting discussions about needed improvements as viewed by the total staff.

*For Students*

Another aspect of this process involves students. Fifth period teachers can spend a class period discussing the following question with students: "What is happening when you feel that you are really learning, working up to your potential? And, during how much of your time in school does that take place? What are the obstacles—in yourself, your classmates, your teacher, in how the school is organized—to a more exciting and learning-filled environment?"

Ask each teacher to keep notes of the session. Collect the individual classroom reports and summarize them for everyone. Share this with both faculty members and students.

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# How To Give a Speech

Every administrator is occasionally called upon to give a speech. Not every administrator, however, feels at ease when doing so.

Why? Fear of giving a speech is often linked to fear of making a mistake, of not being perfect, of making a fool of oneself. But the fear is unreasonable.

Effective speakers, says speaking consultant Sandy Linver, are not necessarily polished or perfect. Instead, they are energetic, willing to be direct, open human beings. They are involved with the subject matter and their audience.

Can you *learn* to become a good speaker? The experts say "yes"— if you are willing to make the best of what you have and are.

There is, in fact, no such thing as a born speaker. True, you may need to unlearn some things you do, such as mumbling or standing stiffly. But learning to speak well in public is not as difficult as learning an entirely new skill.

The following tips will enable you to improve your speaking ability.

## Preparing for Your Speech

When you are asked to speak, find out as much as you can about the occasion and the audience. Are you the only speaker, or will you be part of a panel? Are you sandwiched between the hors d'oeuvres and the dinner speech?

If your speech is scheduled for a back-to-school event for parents, what else is on the agenda? Can you tie it into your speech?

Will your audience be composed mainly of peers? Subordinates? Parents? Angry taxpayers? A mixture?

Next, determine the purpose for the speech. Is it to inform or to persuade the audience? Is it a combination of the two?

With the audience, the occasion, and your purpose in mind, you are ready to start shaping your message. Jot down ideas or talk into a tape recorder to come up with an outline that includes about three main points (for a 15 to 20-minute speech).

Experts warn that this is where most speakers get into trouble. They forget that people cannot absorb much information at a single hearing; thus, they try to cover too much. As a rule of thumb, if you cannot clearly restate your message in about three or four sentences after reviewing your speech, you are including too much information or your content is fuzzy.

Figure out what your big ideas are and how you can best illustrate them. Simple analogies, metaphors, and, particularly, personal examples can help your audience understand what you are trying to say.

If you have some complex material or statistics to present, interpret or highlight the material with several examples and distribute the detailed information in printed form.

How long should you talk? If you are scheduled to fill 30 minutes, you should probably prepare a 15-minute speech and allow for a 15-minute question and answer period.

## Choosing Your Words

- **Be simple and use specific examples.** Here is how one speaker used a glass of milk to describe the nation's free enterprise system:

  > One farmer bred and raised a cow. Another farmer owned and tended the land it grazed on. He bought special feed from another person. Yet another farmer milked the cow and sold the milk to someone else, who processed it, pasteurized it, and packaged it. He sold it to a wholesaler, who sold it to a retailer. All along the line the product was either made better or its distribution was simplified and narrowed. And the process provided a lot of people with jobs. Wealth was created.

- **Be smooth.** Avoid long clauses that divert the listener's attention from your main points. Use contractions.
- **Be vivid; appeal to the senses.** To illustrate: Robert Taylor, Chairman of the Board for Ontario Hydro, wanted to explain that his company's nuclear plants are safe. He said:

  > You could sit naked, if you had a mind to, at the boundary fence around the nuclear station for a year, drink the water, and eat the fish from nearby Lake Ontario, and you would pick up a total of five units of radiation. That's less than you would get from natural sources such as rocks, good air, and cosmic rays. A single chest x-ray would give you eight times that exposure.

- **Keep your audience in step with you.** Use transitions, list points, enumerate, summarize.
- **Be at ease with a moment's silence.** Don't fill in with "um," "you know," "okay," or "let's see." Consider: Bob Hope prospers on pauses.
- **Don't tell jokes.** In most cases, they are best left to professional entertainers.
- **Don't start with "ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to...."**
- **Don't load your message with educationese,** complex sentence structure, "fancy" words. You want to call attention to the message, not the words.

## When Your Speech Is Ready

Rehearse your speech about four times. Do so to a live audience (your spouse or a friend), or use a tape recorder. Strive to sound natural, relaxed, friendly, conversational. Your beginning should attract attention and , of course, be related to what follows. Your conclusion should leave the audience with a message or suggestions for action.

Rehearse your gestures (don't include unless you use them naturally). If you plan to use a flip chart or audiovisuals, they should also be part of your rehearsal.

Tell your host exactly what you will need to make the presentation, down to a glass of water. Leave nothing to chance.

## Last-Minute Considerations

- Number your note cards or manuscript pages, or put them in a loose-leaf binder.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Rehearse one last time, as close to the hour you are to speak as possible.
- Arrive early; check the room and any equipment you will use.
- Relax. Take some deep breaths to get rid of tension.
- As you are being introduced, think of the business at hand--adjusting your clothes, making sure your notes are in order, getting to the lectern. Don't dwell on fears of failing.

## Giving the Speech

- Look as relaxed as you can. Smile. If you are comfortable with your hands in your pockets or moving around, do so. The audience will sense your mood.
- Keep your head up and eye your audience, even those in the farthest corners.
- Speak with as much energy and enthusiasm as you can muster.
- Listen to the audience. Be aware of how people are reacting. You may need to stop and do something about a disturbance—a loud air conditioner, for example. If you lose your audience, you may need to wrap up quickly with your prepared closing and move on to questions.

### Use a Manuscript?

**To use or not to use a manuscript is a big decision for the novice speaker. The experts are divided in their opinions. Some advise writing everything down, then memorizing the beginning and the end so you can present these portions without reading them. Some others say novices should work from note cards because only an experienced speaker can read a speech in such a way that it doesn't sound like it is being read.**

### Audiovisuals: Boon or Bane for Speakers?

Audiovisual materials may seem like an attractive way to dress up a speech, but they should be used only if they are of professional calibre. Out-of-focus slides, lettering that is too small to read, and out-of-sequence photos will add nothing to your presentation. In fact, they will detract from it.

When can you justify going to the extra effort and expense of using audiovisual materials? On the following occasions, according to the *Journal of Educational Communication:* When presenting an annual report, dedicating a new building, or reporting from a major advisory committee.

The magazine provides these tips for using audiovisuals:

✓ If you plan to use slides, a good quality 35mm camera is a necessity. Better yet, hire a professional photographer.

✓ Avoid cliché photos, such as handshakes, people pointing at charts, or posing for the camera.

✓ Do not try to photograph typewritten copy, such as a chart or list, for use in a slide. Instead convert the material to a large transparency for use with an overhead projector. This works best if you are in a small room (talking to not more than 50 people).

✓ When word slides are necessary, have the copy typeset before photographing it.

✓ Don't put a lot of reading material on a slide. Instead, duplicate the material and distribute it to the audience.

In any event, audiovisuals should be used only when the spoken word alone cannot convey the essentials of your message.

*Written by Shirley Boes Neill, Carmichael, Calif.*

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# How To Handle Death in the School

Educational leaders believe they are prepared for every possible situation and/or crisis. They attend seminars and workshops dealing with teacher strikes, budget defeats, legal action, media invasions, declining enrollments, and AIDS. They review the literature and professional journals on how to cope with low test scores, an "aging" faculty, and shrinking budgets.

But what do they do when a space shuttle containing the first teacher in space suddenly explodes while students watch?

How does a principal face 1,200 students in a high school and tell them that four popular seniors were killed in an automobile accident the night before?

What does a principal do when parents want his or her help in informing a 17-year-old that her brother was killed in an accident?

What words or actions can the administration provide for the students and staff of his or her school when a popular teacher dies?

Through workshops and inservice programs, school administrators can learn how to take decisive and positive action in dealing with the grief and the emotional reaction of students and staff members.

When one considers that each year 1 out of every 750 young people will die or be killed, the urgency of establishing a procedure for informing students of "bad news" becomes obvious. Young people are looking for models or standards for their behavior in times of grief and, as in the case of many other social and emotional situations, it is the educational system that must often supply the "solution."

The school leader also has the responsibility to demonstrate that, while our losses may be tragic, personal, and devastating, "life must go on."

If educators wait until the tragedy occurs, they are forced to decide what to do, or how to do it, in the face of time pressures and highly charged emotions. But, as most would agree, an ounce of prevention can curtail a pound of negative consequences.

The following are guidelines that can be implemented in most schools.

## Guidelines for Informing an Individual Student

- The student should be told by someone whom he or she trusts and sees as an authority figure. The principal is often the logical choice.
- Someone who is close to the student (teacher, nurse, counselor, or fellow student) should be asked to remain with the student after he or she receives the news.
- The student should be taken to a place where he or she will have *privacy* and can remain and rest after receiving the news. The student should be able to sit or to lie down if necessary. (The nurse's office meets both of these requirements in most schools.)
- The student should be told what has happened quietly, simply, and directly. Platitudes or religious symbolism should be avoided. Unnecessary details should not be offered but all questions must be answered directly and honestly. One should not be afraid to speak about feelings and emotions; it can help the student to sort out confusing reactions and to see the school in a supporting role (even at a later date). The wishes of the family should be respected as much as possible.
- After the student has been told the news, he or she may have any number of reactions. Remember that there is no one "correct" response.
- Physical contact with the student may have a calming effect, but not all students will want this. If the student wishes to merely sit, his or her wishes should be respected. However, the student should not be left alone.
- If the student remains silent, inform him or her that it is all right to express how he or she feels.
- All the student's teachers should be informed of the circumstances as soon as possible.

## Guidelines for Dealing with "Community Grief"

Most of the points listed above are intended for interaction with an individual and will be of little value when the entire school community is affected. The sheer numbers of affected students would make it impossible for the individual needs of everyone to be addressed by a single person. Such a traumatic situation requires the cooperation of all school personnel.

The following guidelines reflect one approach to this type of situation:

- The chief school administrator makes an announcement to the entire student body. The students are instructed to remain in their classes and are told that they will receive more information shortly. Teachers and aides should be aware that this directive requires everyone to cooperate and may require students to stay in their classes beyond what would normally be the end of the class period.
- One or more persons will then go to each class and convey the news of the event. All available information should be given in a calm, direct manner. The person conveying the information can then answer questions or allow time to discuss feelings and reactions.

During this time, the person may discuss the meaning and effects of this loss, answer student questions about funeral etiquette, or help the class decide if they want to have some observance as a class. (This observance may consist of helping to meet some of the immediate needs of the deceased's family.)

- When all classes have been informed, a follow-up, schoolwide announcement will be made. It may be appropriate to observe a moment of silence if there has been a loss of life.
- If a memorial is planned in the school, students should be allowed and encouraged to take an active part in the planning.

Since faculty members play such an important part in all of this, staff workshops should be scheduled before a tragedy occurs so that teachers can see what feelings and experiences of their own might help or complicate the situation. Working with staff and students after a tragedy is not impossible, but the process of "psychic annulment" makes helping them more difficult.

While dealing with death and grief is never pleasant, the astute administrator must be prepared. This preparation can reduce the intensity of the situation, eliminate the possibility of a faux pas, and demonstrate administrative leadership.

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*Written by Robert G. Stevenson, social studies teacher, and Harry L. Powers, principal at River Dell Senior High School, Oradell, N.J.*

## How To Fight Teenage Suicide: Guide to the Danger Signals

Suicidal behavior among teenagers can be spotted in time, according to physicians at the University of Michigan Medical Center.

They have developed and successfully tested a profile to help parents and professionals identify potential teenage suicide victims.

Dr. Norman Alessi, who is assistant professor of psychiatry at the U-M Medical Center and director of the Child and Adolescent Affective Disorders Program at the U-M Medical Center, and Dr. Douglas R. Robbins, former assistant professor of psychiatry at the U-M Medical Center, developed their suicide profile from a study of 27 males and 37 female teens who were hospitalized at the U-M Medical Center's Children's Psychiatric Hospital.

Examples of important clues to watch for are depressed mood, anhedonia (lack of a sense of pleasure), social withdrawal, decreased performance in school, and a noticeable increase in substance use.

The researchers found that the combination of a depressed mood with drug or alcohol abuse is the deadliest combination.

In his research, Alessi found two general types of suicidal teens. One is the teen who seems to be doing well with friends, in school, and in the other areas of his life, then undergoes a marked change. School performance falls, personal hygiene decreases, he or she withdraws socially, has problems sleeping, and begins losing weight.

"Many of these teens have a biological disposition favoring suicide," Alessi said. "A chemical imbalance develops in the brain. Usually there is a history of depression, alcoholism, and suicide in their families. Some of these people are being treated now with drugs to help restore the chemical imbalance, but much more research is needed to effectively help these people, who are considered biological time bombs."

The second type of suicidal teen is one who has not done well in school. This teen is found on the fringe of social activities and may have a learning disability. "People around them usually see this teen as a loser, not as an accepted person," Alessi said. "This teen feels tremendous despair because he begins defining himself according to how others see him. This teen also seems to have a higher potential for suicide."

*For more information contact the University of Michigan Medical Center, Health News Service, 300 N. Ingalls, NI5E06, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48109-2007.*

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# How To Handle Staff Members' Personal Problems in the Workplace

Mrs. Flask, the chemistry teacher, is taking several days of leave for a divorce hearing.

Rumors buzz through the faculty lounge that one of the English teachers is putting more than cream and sugar in his coffee.

The football coach, who retired from the semi-pro ranks with a permanent back injury, falls asleep in a faculty meeting and later explains that it is "just the pain medicine" prescribed by his doctor.

At one time or another, nearly every member of your staff will have a "bad day" at work caused by a personal problem. An argument with a spouse or a flat tire on the way to school can certainly put a crimp in a professional's day.

Usually the fallout from these occasional hassles is little more than a pop quiz or short temper. Many teachers are able to close off the outside world upon entering the schoolhouse door, and all but the worst personal problems don't seem to affect their work.

But sometimes the excess baggage that employees bring with them into the workplace can make them walking time bombs, waiting for the fuse to burn a bit shorter.

If you think staff members' personal problems are none of your business, you are wrong.

Absenteeism, poor job performance, staff conflicts, and careless supervision of students often have their roots in problems outside the workplace.

Too many principals "cope" with their employees' personal problems by waiting until things get out of hand and then taking adverse action. Firing an employee should be a last resort . . . for practical reasons. Quite a bit of damage can be done while you are waiting for the evidence to pile up, and firing an employee is a time-consuming, often expensive solution.

Problems come with the territory, and principals, as front-line managers, cannot maintain control of their schools without some skill in handling personal problems.

One concern among principals is the legality of getting involved. Poking around behind the scenes can lead to accusations of invasion of privacy. If pressed too far without substantial cause, even the most well-meaning inquiries can lead to lawsuits.

The first rule of thumb is simple: An employee's personal problems are private *until they begin to affect job performance.*

When that line is crossed and a teacher's work begins to suffer, what do you do?

- Close the door and pray?
- Get out the personnel manual?
- Share the wisdom of your years?

These methods of handling (or not handling) personal problems generally don't work well because they rarely assist a teacher or other staff member to face and handle the underlying cause of their on-the-job symptoms.

Several other pitfalls should be avoided when tackling your personnel management role.

- Your office is not a clinic. You can't make the problem get smaller by playing psychiatrist. Even if you have a few credits in psychology or read every issue of *Psychology Today* from cover to cover, you have no business putting an employee on the couch or analyzing symptoms of emotional distress.
- Your office is not a confessional. Confession may be good for the soul, but it has no place in the employer-employee relationship. Limit your interest to obtaining enough information to refer employees to someone who can give them some real professional help.
- Your office is not the neighborhood bar. The local dispenser of liquid solace may be a professional friend, role model, and part-time shoulder, but you can't afford to become a guru or buddy to your staff members—especially those who are experiencing crises at home.

The simplest guideline is: Don't get involved in ferreting out the *problem*, get involved in finding the *solution*.

## Principal as Facilitator

Your role as principal is that of a facilitator. You can maintain sufficient distance and objectivity (and stay out of entanglements that only create more problems and confusion) by providing information and guidance.

A well-prepared principal is a resource for troubled employees. The phone numbers of local and national hotlines for every problem from child abuse to impotence should be available in every principal's Rolodex. (Don't forget to keep the phone numbers up-to-date. Check them periodically.)

If your school system has an employee counseling center, know the people who work there, what their capabilities are, and when they are open for business. Be able to make first-hand referrals; it helps to give your employee the name of a person to contact as well as a phone number.

If you don't have an in-house counseling capability in your school district, find out about intervention programs in the community or nearby cities. Teaching hospitals, health clinics, and universities are often sources for referrals and inexpensive programs.

Don't limit your research to AL-ANON, the local drug hotline, and the rape center. Be prepared. Your employees may need financial or tax advice, medical or psychological consultation, legal assistance, or help in locating a runaway child. Concentrate your efforts on being a resource for getting help for any type of personal problem.

## A Case Study

Miriam is a 28-year-old high school librarian who has a good record. Students often seek her out to discuss schoolwork, sponsor clubs, or help chaperon school dances.

Last summer, she married a man after a brief courtship. As the semester winds on, you notice that she has become quiet, eats alone in her office rather than in the cafeteria, and seems to be wearing a lot of make-up. During Thanksgiving vacation she broke her arm in a "skiing accident," even though she has never expressed an interest in skiing or told anyone that she had a ski trip planned.

In the last month, she has been absent eight times with vague excuses. This morning, she appears in your office to explain that the library budget is late because she has been too preoccupied with some "family" problems.

What do you do? Should you accept her excuse and ignore her recent lapses in performance? Do you start asking questions among the faculty to see if she has confided in another member of the staff? Is it appropriate to ask further questions? Have you jumped to the conclusion that she has married a wife-abuser?

*First, don't jump to conclusions or presume to know the problem from the symptoms.* Remember your role as manager. It is your responsibility to recognize *when* a problem exists and know *where* to get help. It is not your job to know the specific problem unless the employee volunteers specifics.

Based on Miriam's attendance problem and failure to complete an assignment, as well as her admission that a problem exists, you are justified in taking the next step. Tell her that whatever her problem may be, it has affected her performance, and you are concerned about her work. Inform her that you are willing to assist her in finding a source of help and that you are going to respect her privacy.

If you have a list of referral agencies or other resources, give her the list and tell her you will be willing to make a contact if she needs further help.

*Don't apologize for doing your job.* Make it clear that the decision to actually seek help is up to her, but that you need to see an improvement in her performance and are willing to be supportive. If she needs time off from work to see a counselor or obtain other assistance, help make arrangements to cover her assignment. If she accepts you as a resource, you must be flexible enough to allow her to take advantage of the referral.

*If the employee becomes defensive, don't get into a debate about problems and causes.* Objectively describe her work performance shortcomings, let her know that these are the basis for your concern, and offer of help. Avoid messy details and concentrate on the job-related reasons why she should seek some solution for her problems.

*Follow district guidelines.* You shouldn't have to face this type of problem alone. A districtwide effort should be made to prepare guidelines and provide support for all principals. You should have back-up from your school board in the form of a clear policy on dealing with employees' personal problems. The school district's attorney should be asked to clarify any legal problems related to privacy, staff contracts, or personnel regulations.

*Don't wait for things to get serious.* If you have a system in place for handling personal problems in the workplace, your employees may be able to seek and get help before a worry turns into a crisis.

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# How To Hold Worthwhile Staff Meetings

Staff meetings can provide an appropriate place and time to discuss problems, boost morale and effectiveness, get things done, and improve the school program.

On the other hand, meetings can be a waste of time, a bore, and an unwelcome test of one's ability to sit upright, stay awake, and feign interest.

What makes the difference? Often, the principal—the person generally responsible for calling a meeting, determining the agenda, setting the tone, and following up with appropriate actions.

Here are a few practical guidelines principals can use to set up meetings that benefit everyone involved and to enhance their leadership role at the same time.

## When To Hold a Meeting

Routine meetings, experts say, often are just that—routine. No one expects much to get done. The chief benefit is a chance to gossip, to catch up on the news. Some principals, however, consider routine meetings valuable for this social interaction. Even if routine meetings turn into gripe sessions, they say, at least staff members have an opportunity to tell what's bothering them.

Other principals hold staff meetings on an irregular basis, as the need arises. Their main concern is making the best use of everyone's time.

Similar concerns surface in other professions. One magazine for business executives recently warned: "Don't start another meeting without defining its purpose and asking these questions: 'If this meeting is successful, how will we know it?' and 'What time will this meeting end?'" By answering these questions, the magazine concluded, "you should be able to hold half as many meetings of much shorter duration, and get twice the results."

While you may not achieve quite this degree of success, planning should help you hold fewer, more worthwhile meetings.

How do you judge whether or not a meeting will be worthwhile? One high school principal, in an interview for this issue of *Tips*, said she simply reflected on past experience. "If I found the main topic for the meeting inappropriate or boring when I was a teacher, I don't subject my teachers to it."

On the other hand, this principal said, "When a decision is going to affect my teachers, I go to great lengths—meeting with individuals and groups of teachers, as well as all staff in a general meeting—to gain their input."

Before proposing a change in the schedule of classes, for example, this principal talked individually with many teachers and then proposed the change at a staff meeting. Only a vocal few spoke up, so the principal distributed a survey in the days following the meeting and required all teachers to sign and return their copies. By announcing the survey results at a staff meeting, the principal prompted more discussion of the proposal. Following the distribution of a revised proposal and more comments, the principal released the new schedule at a regular staff meeting, well in advance of the time it would be implemented.

Some experts advise executives to cancel a routine meeting if the agenda does not justify the expenditure of time and money. Try a simple calculation: Multiply the number of people expected to attend by their average hourly pay. If, for example, 30 people who make $10 per hour attend a two-hour meeting, the cost is $600. The question to ask yourself is this: Will this meeting be worth at least $600?

Schedule meetings, the experts recommend, when you must resolve or clarify an issue, gain input, or explain something too complicated to put on paper.

### When Not To Hold a Meeting

- Don't hold a meeting to read something out loud when a printed version has been distributed.
- Don't hold a meeting to make general announcements. Use a simpler method of getting the word out. Some ideas: memos stuffed in individual mail slots or posted on bulletin boards, newsletters, notes, directives, posters, the public address system, inserts in pay check envelopes.
- Don't hold a large meeting to deal with a problem

### A Few Words About Time

To make the best use of time at a meeting:

- Plan the agenda. Estimate the amount of time required to deal with each item, calculate the total, then double this figure.
- Start on time. Don't make those who are prompt wait for those who are not. Otherwise, you'll have a larger number of latecomers at your next meeting.
- End the meeting on time, or a little early. To do so start to wind down 5 or 10 minutes before everyone is scheduled to leave.
- If you want to hold a short meeting—15 minutes or so—keep everyone standing. Call it a briefing.
- A meeting of 1½ hours or less is considered ideal. If the meeting runs longer, schedule a break, refreshments, a chance to stretch and move around.

that affects only a few people. Confer with those people individually or in a small group.

- Don't hold a meeting—particularly on a topic you consider vital—when you are not fully prepared with the necessary background material or if you have not thought through possible staff concerns. One idea: Explore with a few trusted colleagues any new ideas that would cause concern among staff members before calling a general meeting on the topic. That way you will be better prepared for reactions.
- Don't schedule a meeting if staff members are already required to attend many extracurricular activities, such as parent conferences, club events, or committee meetings, during the week you want to hold the meeting.

## During the Meeting

Four rules generally apply to any meeting:

1. Courtesy to all.
2. One item at a time.
3. The majority rules, but with respect for the rights of the minority.
4. Justice for all and partiality for none.

Some of your behaviors at a meeting can increase your staff members' willingness to participate and carry out the actions you propose. Other behaviors simply mark you as a dictator. To achieve the former and escape the latter:

- Avoid sounding like an oracle.
- Remain calm and professional in your manner of speech.
- Allow all sides of an issue to be heard. Be aware, however, that you will lose some staff members if the meeting bogs down for a prolonged period on one point.
- Don't be afraid of differences of opinion. Recognize that dissent is a basic component of the decision-making process. But once a decision is made, urge all staff members to abide by it.
- Don't repeatedly ask the same persons to assume responsibility for doing something. Spread the tasks around.
- Avoid the temptation to make snap decisions or judgments. Get the facts first. In fact, get them before the meeting, if possible.
- Realize that the top item on your agenda may be fairly low on the priority list of some staff members. Spend time finding out why. You may convert some critics.

**Other Tips**

- Put your goals for the meeting in writing, and glance at them periodically during the meeting. Ask yourself if you are accomplishing those goals.
- Review previous findings and actions concerning the issue under discussion.
- Stick to the agenda, but keep in mind that slavish adherence to it may kill the creativity that emerges from a free flow of ideas.
- Keep an informal, personal record of ideas, even if you have some more formal means of note taking. Ideas mentioned briefly but not jotted down may be forgotten.
- Involve other administrators and department heads. Vice-principals and counselors, for example, should answer questions on issues relating to their responsibilities.

## When a So-So Meeting Becomes Worthwhile

Bonuses accrue from meetings when you:

- Use the occasion to publicly acknowledge a job well done.
- Give staff members a chance to share newly learned skills.
- Realize that not every staff member will use the occasion of a staff meeting to speak up. If the matter under discussion is important, find another way for reticent staffers to make their views known. The "silent" staffers will appreciate your efforts.
- Set deadlines for final action on items under discussion.
- Summarize recommendations and decisions. Put decisions in writing and distribute them following the meeting.
- Evaluate each meeting—however informally—or ask some trusted participants for their evaluation and suggestions for improvement. Use the information to revise the format of your next meeting.

### How About Those Little Meetings That Eat Up Your Day?

Some principals pride themselves on maintaining an "open door policy" for all staff members.

An open door, however, can become a revolving door that subjects a principal to constant interruptions for important, unimportant, emergency, and routine matters.

One solution, suggested by management consultant R. James Steffen in a recent issue of *U.S. News & World Report*, is "an enlightened open door policy."

It includes four steps:

1. Determine the most convenient time for talking to people.
2. Contact the people you regularly deal with and find out when they need you most.
3. Agree with them on a time when you will be available on a regular basis.
4. Explain that at other times you will be available only for emergencies.

*Written by Shirley Boes Neill, Charmichael, Calif.*

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# How To Improve Inservice Education

One of the biggest challenges facing principals in the 1980s is providing effective inservice education or staff development programs appropriate to the needs of today's teachers and students.

Consider these factors:

**Teachers.** Many of the teachers in today's schools have been on the job for a long time; They already have a master's degree and are at the top of the pay scale. Morale is low, transfers are down, and new teachers with fresh ideas can't get in.

**New demands.** Some secondary schools already face demands to upgrade student competence in math, science, and writing. In addition, knowledge about computers is increasingly being recognized as a must for every high school graduate.

**New knowledge.** In the past few years, researchers and educators have made many discoveries about effective schools, effective teachers, learning styles, classroom management, and basic skills instruction. Schools must find ways to pass this knowledge on to teachers.

While all these factors indicate an unprecedented need for inservice education, principals must confront a sobering fact: Traditional inservice education has a bad name. Teachers complain about their lack of involvement in planning, "ivory-tower" instructors, and theory-laden content that is dull, useless, or inappropriate to their needs.

Some other common complaints are:

- Lecturing, commonly used by inservice instructors, is the method teachers prefer least.
- Districts may decide to make wholesale improvement but are unwilling or unable to devote enough resources and time to the effort.
- Teachers receive little help or support in using what they have learned after they return to the classroom.

If that list leaves you saying, "what's the use?" hang on. Although substantial information on effective inservice education is lacking, current research about effective schools offers some helpful insights.

## Helpful Insights

Researchers believe that collaboration in planning and decision making by each school's administrators and teachers leads to improved staff development. If the central office plans staff development activities, teachers probably won't "buy in" or develop ownership in the program.

Collaboration can also take other forms: teachers coaching each other in instructional methods, or teachers, administrators, and researchers working together to effect school improvement.

A second notion, "continuous improvement," is featured in the school effectiveness literature. It calls for schools (and administrators) to reflect the belief that instructional improvement on the part of teachers is continuous and never-ending, rather than something that happens only to beginning teachers.

Current thinking about effective staff development also reflects what is known about adult learning in general: (1) Lectures are not adequate to change behavior; adults need direct and concrete experience to be able to apply what they learn. (2) Adults prefer to learn in normal work settings where they can interact socially with peers.

## Important Considerations

In designing and implementing inservice education, schools often follow this pattern: assess needs, establish priorities for training, develop objectives, design inservice activities, evaluate the activities.

Whatever pattern is followed, experts advise that staff members be given a significant role in all aspects of an inservice program. Some guidelines will be helpful, however.

If, for example, your school holds workshops to develop consensus regarding needs, you may have to remind participants to focus on areas where inservice can help. Otherwise, such a workshop could turn into a gripe session about administrative matters.

One suggested format to keep a committee on target requires participants to identify the problem, contributing factors to the problem, the objectives of inservice, a suggested format for the activities, and suggested consultants.

One principal found faculty members more willing to help organize an inservice project when he sent several teachers personal notes instead of the traditional memo.

When working with an inservice committee to develop an acceptable approach to solving a school problem, you may find the advice of one prominent negotiator helpful. "Be soft with the persons with whom you are negotiating," he said, "but tough as hell with the problem."

In planning for evaluation of inservice activities, administrators need to consider both evaluation of the specific inservice activities and of changes in programs or people as a result of the inservice. Even

if the results pan this year's inservice efforts, they are invaluable when used to decide about future activities.

## Heed the Yellow Lights

What should you avoid or be careful about in planning inservice activities? Here are some cautions suggested by administrators and researchers:

- If a school has more than one inservice program, coordination is required. Otherwise, the programs may compete for teachers' attention.
- Teachers want inservice that is relevant and feasible; that meets their immediate concerns and teaches them to handle specific classroom situations. They would like to have more workshops that combine application with theory, idea swaps, and make-and-take sessions, according to the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education.
- A staff development activity with good content but poor delivery is not likely to bring about change in teacher behavior.
- Similarly, a program with good delivery but poor content will be equally ineffective.
- If a schoolwide problem is the subject of inservice, it's a good idea to have an interdepartmental mix of persons on the planning committee.
- Periodically stress to the group the goals of the inservice effort; this may help keep the committee on track.
- For the greatest success of an inservice effort, all members of the training group should have approximately the same goals for training.
- Staff development programs that call for follow-up in which peers watch each other teach can terrify some teachers.
- Be cautious about taking away instructional time. If you set up a situation where an entire department is going to be out of the building, many students may decide to skip classes. Be sure you have competent substitutes.
- If a college course is the favored mode of inservice, offering it at your school, rather than on a college campus, may induce the instructor to tailor the course to your needs.
- In some cases, giving teachers an opportunity to talk business—with few constraints—may be the best inservice of all.

### If I Had My Way . . .

One of the most stimulating and valuable inservice opportunities available to teachers is to observe one another at work, says Jere E. Brophy, director of the Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT) at Michigan State University.

"If I were running a school district," Brophy says in a recent IRT publication, "I would try to find ways to make sure that each teacher visited several other classrooms each year, preferably classrooms in other schools."

Brophy predicts maximum benefits from such an arrangement when teachers working with similar grade levels and types of students form cooperative pairs or small groups to visit and provide feedback to one another. In ideal situations, this could include audiotaping or videotaping teachers in action, with opportunities to review and discuss the tapes later.

## Pay Attention to Logistics

One of the major complaints of teachers about traditional inservice is the instructors.

Florida teacher Rosemary Buchanan put it this way: "Nearly every consultant is an education professor or ex-teacher with impressive degrees. Invariably, they are born mixers with ingratiating smiles who get paid very well for their time. However, most consultants seem like twinkling stars in my earthbound milieu . . . No one can assess a specific school and the needs of its staff in a day or two. . . ."

Buchanan suggests that schools rely more on their own teachers and other staff. Numerous schools are doing precisely that.

A study of teachers in Fairfax County (Va.) Public Schools concluded that if teachers want to learn from each other, they become resources.

The study recommended that principals develop strategies that enable staff to function as peers who teach and learn from each other. The secret, according to the study, is in identifying topics, roles, and activities that dovetail with staff interests, needs, and abilities.

*The scheduling of inservice activities* also affects teachers' attitudes. They consider "tired time"—after 4 p.m. and on weekends—the wrong time for inservice. Whenever possible, conduct at least some of the activities during school hours.

Other good times to schedule staff development, with no payment for substitutes or stipends, include regular teachers meetings, professional days, department and team meetings, early dismissal days, and teacher planning periods.

*Written by Shirley Boes Neill, Carmichael, Calif.*

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# How To Improve School Programs With Student Input

On the threshold of graduation from high school, how do seniors look back at their school and education? What did they like? What do they wish had been different? What could have been improved?

One way to find the answers to these questions is to ask the students. Their responses can help administrators improve the school and the education offered to the students.

With this thought in mind, I decided to talk to the 375 seniors at Needham (Mass.) High School. At a class meeting, I told them that I planned to talk to each senior and that I would ask them two questions:

- What benefits have you received and what have you liked about high school?
- If you were principal, what improvements would you make to provide a better high school experience?

In the fall, I made appointments outside of classroom time with each senior. I reminded them of the two questions and assured them that their answers would be confidential. Students were discouraged from identifying teachers and were told that the emphasis was on ideas rather than personalities.

During the interviews, I let the students talk with minimum interruption from me. Consequently, the students were able to give a considerable amount of information in 15 minutes or less.

At the conclusion of each interview, I read my notes to the student and made corrections if the student indicated that I did not adequately represent his or her views.

## Student Responses—Good and Bad

The seniors were cooperative and sincere. If they offered criticisms and suggestions, they usually recognized and emphasized the favorable aspects of the school also.

Through this process, I could see the school more clearly through the eyes of seniors and was very impressed with their strong support of the teachers and the instructional program. My respect grew for the teachers and for the seniors.

The following areas were among those addressed by the students, along with samples of their comments.

### Teachers

*Favorable* (130 responses)

- Teachers are very good, impressive, helpful, terrific, excellent, willing to help, have a sense of humor, mostly nice, experienced, extremely dedicated, strict but not too strict, high quality, cooperative, willing to devote time to students.

*Problems* (14 responses)

- A teacher used a failing mark as an example to other students—it hurts
- Teachers should trust students more.

### School Spirit

*Favorable* (21)

- All-around good spirit
- Pep rally for track team was a step forward
- Students are giving a much better impression of the school—realize it is the students who reflect the school.

*Problems* (18)

- School spirit should be emphasized
- Sometimes students get into cliques, little groups, it's hard for students to get acquainted when coming here
- Could improve spirit for sports

### Student-Teacher Relations

*Favorable* (19)

- Absolutely wonderful student-faculty relationships; plays a big part in your attitudes toward school
- Friendliness, informality between teachers/students
- Close relationships help strengthen those with emotional problems.

*Problems* (2)

- Get to know teachers after school, but not in the classroom
- Not always what it should be.

### General Outstanding Characteristics

*Favorable* (108)

- Can think of nothing to improve the school
- Have nothing against it
- Love Needham High School

*Problems* (2)

- Not interested in school—good as far as schools go
- Nothing impresses student.

DISCIPLINE

*Favorable* (10)

- Orderly school—discipline is excellent
- Rules are alright
- Never had any difficulty with anyone or anything
- No discipline problems—students do not have time.

*Problems* (17)

- Cannot see reason for parking tickets
- More privileges for students such as not being in homerooms at 8:15
- Should be more strict
- Does not approve of students cutting up in study halls
- Give serious credit for maturity; do away with detention

ACADEMIC STANDING

*Favorable* (10)

- Good scholastic rating
- High standards
- Pride, confidence
- Hard but fair
- Atmosphere conducive to learning
- Prepares students for college

ADVANCED PLACEMENT AND ACCELERATED CLASSES

*Favorable* (21)

- Good chance for people with ability to advance
- Learned twice as much
- Have to work to capacity

*Problems* (2)

- More boys
- Inform students about courses before placing them in courses

CURRICULUM

*Favorable* (35)

- Good courses
- High standards

*Problems* (8)

- Add Greek if enough students would be interested
- Require college prep students to take certain classes
- More courses for those going to work
- More technical courses.

ADMINISTRATION

*Favorable* (16)

- Rules seem good for the school
- Like the notices
- Well-run school
- Willingness of administrators to look after interests of students

*Problems* (24)

- Student teachers in critical senior year
- Need more time between classes
- Drop study halls and shorten the day
- Want to see the principal often.

I summarized the senior responses and presented them at a faculty meeting, suggesting that we consider each one and determine what action, if any, was needed.

The staff members accepted the student responses in a positive and constructive manner and agreed that we should evaluate each problem and recommendation to determine if action was needed to improve upon neglected areas of the school's operation.

The principal needs facts, opinions, and judgments of those affected by the school's programs to raise the objectives and set improved standards to help teachers and students reach their goals.

One way of doing this is to ask the students!

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*Written by Walter G. Patterson, former principal at Needham (Mass.) High School and now educational consultant to the Education Cooperative, Wellesley, Mass.*

## Should Students Be Involved?

Students in a public secondary school should be involved in the school's decision-making process only if the administrators are willing to take prudent but definite risks. A necessary risk involves a willingness to have faith, trust, and confidence in young people to the point of allowing them to share mistakes with administrators and staff in crucial areas of the school.

Only if the administration believes that students can learn to be responsible and to make meaningful decisions can it share its power. Confidence must exist that students can contribute significantly to the decision-making process. Both administration and staff must want to involve their students in what is essentially a collaborative learning experience in democracy.

*From "Are Students Involved in Deciding Crucial Issues?" by James E. Calkins,* Bulletin, *October 1974.*

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# How To Improve the Inservice Climate

Memories of past boredom or the distractions of present obligations may rob teachers of any enthusiasm about inservice training.

The teachers' resistance may be reduced by ensuring that the sessions are relevant, well-designed, offered at an appropriate time, and delivered by someone credible.

The inservice training planner must also pay careful attention to the learning climate, a factor that is often overlooked.

Instead of making sure the climate is pleasant and conducive to learning, many trainers devote their energy to making sure they are offering flawless presentations, "knock-your-socks-off" media, clever exercises, and games.

Why is climate vital to inservice learning?

Prompting a change in skill, knowledge, or attitude is sometimes difficult. Teachers come to a staff development program having invested many years in making themselves what they are. To let go of comfortable old habits and attempt to adopt new ones requires a risk. The risk is heightened when such attempts are made in the presence of other teachers.

A supportive, encouraging learning climate fosters risk taking. If teachers believe they are among people who care that they succeed, they are more likely to experiment with new behaviors or views. Such experimentation is essential to productive growth.

A proper climate does not necessarily generate wild enthusiasm among participants. It does mean most people are in a cooperative frame of mind, are not unduly distracted, and are serious about working.

Such a climate evolves in two ways: through the design and through the trainer's words and actions.

A few important design aspects include:

- Climate-setting activities that allow easy participation
- Activities that relate in some way to the content of the program; trivial icebreakers rarely break the ice
- Activities that do not place participants in competitive situations in which they might "fail" or be embarrassed
- Activities that fit the culture of the school and the background of the teachers
- Finally, climate-setting activities that do not plunge participants into the thick of the program content without a chance to get comfortable in the setting.

From the beginning of the learning program, the trainer must adopt language and actions that support a productive, positive climate—informal but businesslike, concerned about individuals and their reactions but also concerned about accomplishing tasks at hand. Here are a few suggestions.

**Before the session:**

- Early in the inservice program, describe your role as guide and facilitator.
- Tell participants that while you have ideas to present, you are interested in their ideas as well.
- Describe the objectives for the session and provide a notion of how time will be managed.
- Let participants know whether you prefer them to hold questions until the end of the lecture or ask questions as they come to mind.

**During the session:**

- Before each break, briefly review major points and your plans for work immediately after the break. ("After lunch, you will begin to examine the major ways . . .") This helps maintain momentum and provides predictability and a sense of security.
- Occasionally, poll the group to ascertain the relevance of the material you are presenting. ("Is what you are learning useful to you?") A few affirmative nods is all you need to go forward.
- Model climate-setting instructions. For example, as you encourage participants to get comfortable, do so yourself.
- Occasionally move around the room during class discussions to foster openness and informality.

Two more factors stimulate the right climate: an attitude that is respectful of participants' individuality and experience, and appropriate language.

## Watch Your Attitude

How do you show participants you respect their individuality and value their experience? Be open to ideas different from those presented in the design. Avoid the view that everyone must learn exactly what you think they should learn in a particular sequence. You are all professionals in a cooperative venture.

Adopt a caring attitude and show it. Treat participants as individuals, not as a homogeneous group. Make supportive comments and identify what is correct about each comment. This does not mean wrong answers are right. It means that exploration, effort, and risk taking should be supported. Inaccurate answers can be flagged without putting down the person who voiced them.

Take the process seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously. A superior or righteous attitude interferes with learning.

## Watch Your Language

The language most conducive to climate setting facilitates rather than controls. It is sometimes difficult to describe the difference, since the critical factor is not necessarily the words used, but the way they are said and the implications they hold. Here are some things to watch out for:

- Be careful about using the royal "we." For example, "Now we are going to analyze a case," may sound patronizing or pushy.
- Don't embarrass or humiliate participants in word, tone, body language, or by not recognizing their work.
- Avoid dictating requests based on your personal desires. Instead of saying, "Now, I want you to look at page five," say, "It is important to take note of the information on page five." This request is based on the needs of the inservice program.
- Never use language, humor, or anecdotes that might offend any group of people—whether these groups are represented in the session or not.

While the climate established will not guarantee that inservice training will become as popular as the teachers' lounge, it will make the experience more positive. More important, it will foster a setting that bolsters confidence and builds competence.

*Chip R. Bell, an independent consultant in Charlotte, N.C., adapted this* Tips for Principals *from* Managing the Leadership Process, *a book he cowrote with Frederick H. Margolis (Minneapolis: Lakewood Publications, 1984).*

### Inservice Programs: What Are the Essentials?

Teachers have a right and obligation to complain about programs that do not account for personal professional needs, that are inflexible, and that evolve from considerations which are unrelated to the needs that are apparent in the day to day reality of the classroom.

In summary, teacher education must be planned, planned about the seminal issues that figure in effective classroom instruction and planned about subjects that will positively influence long-range professional growth. The connection between teacher evaluation and inservice is obvious and its omission in any school system invites a serious charge of administrative oversight and faulty coordination.

Robert Byrne in "Inservice Programs—What Are the Essentials for Making Them Effective?" in the March 1983 issue of the *NASSP Bulletin.*

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# How To Improve Your Substitute Teaching Program

Do your substitute teachers teach? If not, your students are losing valuable instructional time.

Students spend an average of 7-10 days each year with substitute teachers—approximately one week. If your substitutes function only as babysitters and law enforcers, your students lose one week of valuable instruction.

- How do you treat your substitute teachers/resource persons? Do you treat them as last-minute babysitters, available on short notice to monitor classes and keep students quiet? Do your substitutes know anything about the school other than its location?
- How do your students treat substitute teachers? Do they misbehave or skip class when they know that they will have a substitute, explaining that they "never do anything anyway" when the teacher is out?
- How do your substitute teachers treat your students? Do they make an effort to teach? Or, do they try only to keep reasonable order, ignore lesson plans, and exclaim that "that school is a madhouse"?

Because substitute teachers are called upon in haste and then forgotten until they are needed again, the substitute teaching program in some schools may not be a priority and, therefore, not effective. All it provides is a last-minute classroom monitor. That does not have to be the case, however; with a little attention, the substitute teaching program in any school can provide valuable resources for the school staff and students and can make effective use of all classroom learning time.

Remember that if you make your substitutes feel that they are a valuable part of the school program, they will be.

## Cream of the Crop

A substitute teaching program is only as effective as the substitute teachers involved. Administrators must realize that people choose to substitute in classrooms for different reasons. Some want to teach, to become involved in young people's education. Others are simply looking for a quick, easy way to make a few dollars without much commitment.

A substitute who is not enthusiastic about teaching from the beginning may be a detriment to your program.

The administrator can, and should, screen potential substitute teachers in an attempt to weed out incompetent teachers and sign up the cream of the crop.

- Interview substitute teacher candidates. The best way to determine whether or not the person truly wants to teach is to ask!
- Assess the candidates' personal qualities such as attitudes toward school, education, young people, and life in general. Do they have a sense of humor? Do they appear to be reasonably responsible? Are they enthusiastic?
- Note each substitutes' expertise and areas of special interest. When a substitute is needed for a history class, you can refer to your list and call the substitute who is familiar with the subject—and enthusiastic about it.
- Don't overlook retired individuals in your community who have special skills that they can share with young people. A discussion about life during the Depression can be a great learning experience—especially when related by someone who has lived through it.
- Scout around the community. Contact local citizens who have a special hobby or interest and ask them if they would be willing to substitute every so often. If you know in advance that a teacher will be absent, arrange for a local artisan to demonstrate his or her craft during the teacher's absence. Invite other classes to participate also.

## Familiarity Breeds Confidence

Often, substitutes enter a classroom knowing little or nothing about the school, policies, students, or teachers. Ideally, substitutes should be as familiar with the school as the full-time teachers are.

Schedule a late summer/early fall orientation meeting for potential substitutes. Provide them with a special packet of materials that includes:

- A floor plan of the school
- A map of the community
- A copy of the school handbook explaining discipline policies, attendance policies, fire drill procedures, and liability laws
- Class schedules and lunch schedules.

Also include a demonstration of audiovisual equipment operation, a discussion of suitable activity alternatives, and, if applicable, a little hands-on experience with classroom microcomputers.

- Give participants a chance to ask questions. In turn, clarify your expectations of them. Tell them that they will be expected to teach.

An alternative or addition to the orientation may be a 7-10 week course in substitute teaching as a part of the adult education program or a certification program for substitute teachers. The courses might cover basic classroom management, learning styles, microcomputer uses in the classroom, and alternative learning activities. The classes do not have to deal with these topics in depth, but they should familiarize teachers with current trends in management and administration, teaching styles, and computer uses.

In addition, some school districts expect or require substitute teachers to attend faculty meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and inservice training sessions. Not only do the substitutes become familiar with the school policies, they also learn more about the teachers they will be substituting for, the students they will be teaching, and the parents of those students.

## In the Classroom

Substitute teachers can be better prepared if they have as much notice as possible. School administrators should stress that their regular teachers call in *at least* the night before they know that they will not be in. In turn, the administrator can call the substitute that night.

The administrator who oversees the substitute program should make a point of greeting the substitute teachers the morning of their duty and accompany them to their classroom, stressing that they are available in case anything is needed.

The administrator or department head should also make an effort to introduce the substitute teacher, if it is his or her first time in the school, to a couple of other teachers in the department so that the substitute will not feel totally alone.

Once in the classroom, the substitute is, for the most part, on his or her own—guided only by the lesson plans left by the regular teacher. If the orientation meeting was effective, the substitute should be familiar with attendance procedures, class schedules, and lunch schedules. (The teacher should also provide a copy of schedules and procedures, nonetheless.)

The regular teacher should also be required to leave easily-administered lesson plans, a seating chart, and safety instructions (fire drill route).

If the teacher absence is planned and lengthy, he or she should provide plans for each and every day. If the absence is unplanned, the teacher should always maintain a file of plans available either in a desk drawer folder or in a special file in the administrator's office. These plans should be updated periodically. They might include relevant discussion topics, theoretical problem situations, and review work sheets that pertain to the subject and are relevant all year.

The lesson plans should not suggest busy work. The substitute teacher is there to teach, not listen to a student read aloud from a textbook or allow students to do their homework from another class. If the substitute teacher has been chosen wisely, and if the regular teacher left adequate lesson plans, classroom learning should proceed as usual.

Because students often equate substitutes with "a free period," regular teachers should stress that the students will be held accountable for the material covered by the substitute—and they should, in turn, be held responsible.

Although they might be familiar with the subject matter and have expertise in a certain area, substitutes should not be expected to chaperone field trips, supervise cooking or scientific experiments, supervise music practice, or introduce complicated new material. They should also not be expected to administer major tests, as they may not be able to adequately clarify questions for students.

The administrator should check with the substitute teacher during lunch breaks or during the teacher's work period, ask how things are going, and provide any needed help or answer questions as needed.

## Feedback and Evaluation

At the end of the day, the administrator should ask for feedback from the substitute teacher. What problems did he or she have? Could they be prevented? Was the work outlined in the lesson plans accomplished?

In turn, evaluate the substitute. Did the classroom seem quiet and orderly during the day? In informal contacts with students did the substitute teacher's name come up and were the comments good or bad? Was the regular teacher happy with what went on during his or her absence?

Ideally, if one administrator oversees the substitute program, the substitute *and* the regular teacher know who to talk to about any problems or concerns.

Substitute teachers who consistently receive poor evaluations, who have trouble managing the classroom, or who do not abide by lesson plans should not be substitute teaching.

The substitute teaching program is only as good as you make it. Extensive teacher preparation and orientation, monitoring, and thought go a long way to make a substitute teaching experience a productive, valuable addition to learning.

*Written by Patricia Lucas George*

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# How To Improve Your Writing

*"All good writing is swimming under water and holding your breath."*

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

If writing is the least favorite part of your job, you're not alone. Experts say most adults dislike and avoid writing.

Our culture, schooling, and time schedules conspire against good writing. The telephone is readily accessible; uninterrupted time to write is a luxury; experiences with composition in school—book reports, essays, dissertations—usually offer inadequate preparation for on-the-job needs.

Yet, principals must write evaluation reports, letters to parents, memos to staff, and articles for the school newspaper or professional journals. Here are some tips to make those jobs a little easier.

## Planning and Care: A Strong Suit

Good writing—the kind that says what it means while being pleasant to read—is never easy for anyone. All writing is a war between a blank sheet of paper and the individual writer. Winning the war requires a plan.

"A poorly planned project (or piece of writing) takes four times longer to complete than expected," says Lawrence J. Peter, author of *The Peter Principle*. "A well planned project only takes twice as long."

The amount of planning and thought that goes into a piece of writing depends, of course, on how important it is. Principals must be very careful in their choice of words when writing a teacher evaluation report or a letter to the parents of a handicapped child explaining school procedures.

Even routine letters and memos, however, deserve more attention than we usually give them. Putting one word in the wrong place can lead to confusion. To illustrate, Ernest Brennecke of Columbia University shows how one sentence can take on eight meanings, simply by moving the word "only":

Only I hit him in the eye yesterday.
I only hit him in the eye yesterday.
I hit only him in the eye yesterday.
I hit him only in the eye yesterday.
I hit him in only the eye yesterday.
I hit him in the only eye yesterday.
I hit him in the eye only yesterday.
I hit him in the eye yesterday only.

## Follow a Process When You Write

You can cut hours, sometimes days, from any writing project by following one basic rule: Think through what you want to say and to whom you want to say it. State the message in one sentence and keep it before you as you write. Let it be your guide to what you keep or cut. Remember that writing is an act of communication. Ultimately you must ask: Will the reader understand what I am saying?

A **memo** should be concise and easily read. Its purpose is to elicit or prohibit action; no attempt should be made to dazzle the reader with fancy penwork. The reader should be able to answer some basic questions after reading your memo: Why was this written? Why did I get it? What am I supposed to do, when, how?

In writing a **letter to parents,** follow the same strategy. Anticipate their questions and objections to your message and, as much as possible, include answers.

They will be more receptive to what you have to say if the tone is positive, honest, friendly, and concerned. Try to make the letter sound natural; write the way you talk.

You should be crystal clear in what you say and be sure to let parents know which items are fact and which are your opinions. Finally, read the letter out loud and ask yourself how you would feel if you got it.

**Longer writing projects,** and sometimes even letters and memos, are easier to tackle if you follow this process:

- Gather the information, evidence, ideas, and observations that give substance to your message.
- Organize the material.
- Write the first draft. Read it out loud. Let someone else read it.
- Reorganize the material; eliminate unnecessary and irrelevant details.
- Rewrite. Read it out loud.
- Edit. Correct the spelling, grammar, punctuation, usage.
- Check the final copy for clarity, typographical errors, and neatness.

Notice that the plan does not include an outline—an optional step. Some persons work comfortably with an official outline when faced with a complicated writing task; others simply jot down reminders of everything they want to cover.

Also notice that the plan calls for a revision of what you've written. In other words, dare to be

messy! Add, delete, substitute, experiment until you're satisfied.

"Principals are very concerned about the need for correctness in their first draft instead of being able to work through a draft," says one writing instructor. "They need to know there's nothing wrong with them if they don't get it right the first time."

Fear about getting it wrong can lead to writer's block. So can any of a hundred other reasons—all of which cause procrastination and false starts. One suggestion to unblock the fingers and the mind is to start anywhere—in the middle or at the end. Just to warm up.

## Nitty-Gritty

Most experts agree that these simple steps can improve your writing:

• Keep it simple. "The ability to write simple, direct prose that says precisely what you want it to say in the fewest words has always been the mark of an educated person."—*Business Week*

• Use the first person. Don't be shy about saying I, we, me. "People identify with people, not with an abstraction like 'it is felt.'"—William Zinsser, author of *On Writing Well: An Informal Guide to Writing Nonfiction*.

• Avoid nounism. "Beware of stringing together two or three nouns where one will do." —Zinsser. Examples: employability skills training, performance ability, curriculum objectives.

• Get rid of most passive verbs. Invariably, by changing a passive verb to an active verb, you produce a shorter sentence.—Edward T. Thompson, *Reader's Digest*.

• Stay with it. Progress in a person's writing sometimes results in a poor product in the short run. Also note: "Writing can get harder rather than easier as you get better at it. The competence a good writer acquires is not so much facility as it is staying power."—Sheridan Blau, director, South Coast Writing Project, Santa Barbara, Calif.

• Be patient. No matter what type, form, or style you choose, if writing is not hard work, you are doing something wrong.—Numerous sources.

### Writing in the Schools

*Writing in the Schools*, by Allan A. Glatthorn, can help you improve the writing program in your school as well as improve your own writing skills. This NASSP monograph helps provide principals with the skills they need to provide effective leadership in evaluating their school's writing program, planning and implementing a staff development program, improving writing across the curriculum, and improving their own skills.

The monograph is available from NASSP for $7 per copy plus shipping and handling.

### Avoid the No. 1 Sin: Jargon

"Just because you work for an institution, you don't have to sound like one." That advice comes from William Zinsser, an author and long-time teacher.

Zinsser chided Connecticut principals attending a writing workshop for favoring pompous, slippery jargon and fad words in their writing. "As parents," he explained, "we want to think of the men and women who are running our children's schools as people not unlike ourselves."

Zinsser pinpointed "chilling phrases" in the principals' writing: "prioritized evaluative procedures," "modified departmentalized schedule," and "enhanced learning environments."

"I don't want to give my school my 'input' and get its 'feedback,' though I'd be glad to exchange ideas and opinions, and even offer some complaints," he said.

Why write about the "school support system" if you mean the teachers, counselors, reading teachers, and aides, another critic added. And, if a technical term such as "norm" must be used, explain that it is only an average, not a standard that every child should be expected to achieve.

The message is simple: Avoid sentences that sound like "informed academic writing."

Other plain-talk advocates caution educators about the use of vogue words and euphemisms. "Parameter" is an example.

Education writer Paul Woodring defined parameter as "a variable entering in the mathematical form of any distribution such that the possible values of the variable correspond to different distributions." You may as well forget that definition, Woodring advised. "If you mean boundaries, say boundaries."

*Written by Shirley Boes Neill, Carmichael, Calif.*

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# How To Increase The Assistant Principal's Effectiveness

The effectiveness of assistant principals (APs) depends on the principal's attitude toward the role of the assistant principal and his or her definition of the term, "effective."

The principal is the key person in increasing the AP's effectiveness. Unless the principal is an advocate of the assistant principalship, actively supporting the position and the persons occupying it through public and private recognition, the results will be disappointing. And, unless the principal sees the rich possibilities in the role of APs and provides the organization and the atmosphere for accomplishing them, some great opportunities will be lost.

## Selecting the Right Person

An essential prerequisite to the AP's effectiveness is a sound and demanding procedure for selecting the individuals for the job, and principals, of course, should have a major voice in the selection process. The wisdom inherent in the old saw, "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," is obvious to anyone who has tried to make fundamental changes in human beings.

In addition to selecting the right person, another requirement for effective performance is determining the AP's role in the school administration. The traditional discipline and attendance responsibilities are not attractive to most APs—especially those whose career goals go beyond the assistant principalship. Assistant principals want experience with the responsibilities and challenges of the principalship, also.

Although student behavior and attendance are important components of administration, they are only a small part of the job. Providing general rather than specific job descriptions is practical because APs often must take over when the principal is out of the building.

In addition, the busywork that APs often have to do is not always needed; these tasks can frequently be handled by office staff members, thus freeing the APs to handle more administrative duties.

## Providing Needed Training

Assistant principals, like everyone else, have strengths and weaknesses, some of which are inherent and resistant to change, such as conceptual and human relations skills and attitudes.

On the other hand, some aspects of performance are amenable to change via well-designed, on-the-job training. Large school districts often operate assessment centers that not only identify the candidates' strengths and weaknesses, but also provide appropriate needs-based training for assistant principals and other school personnel. Even in small districts that employ only a few APs, principals can build in useful training geared to weaknesses that may have surfaced during the selection process.

The principal can work with the AP in self-assessment, goal setting, data gathering, and evaluating progress for both formative and summative purposes.

## Shaping the Job

Assuming that an able person has been selected for the job, and that the appropriate preservice and inservice training has been or will be provided, the next requirement for effective performance of an AP pertains to the ongoing aspects of the job itself.

Perhaps the most important concept is involving the AP in policy making, planning, and daily decision making with regard to school administration. Since the AP's authority to act must be delegated and supported by the principal, a real sharing of responsibility by means of an administrative team built on collegial relationships is essential.

Depending on the size of the school and the number of administrators involved, the specific organizational arrangements can be made to utilize APs and other school personnel most effectively. Duties can be rotated so each AP has an opportunity to experience all or most of the job responsibilities of the principal. In some schools, especially large ones, this generalization of experience is accomplished by assigning APs to grade levels. The APs follow students in their assigned grade through to graduation.

APs should attend meetings or conferences, visit schools, serve on district committees, or work with community organizations to provide community services to the schools as well as school services to the community. If school district money for trips is scarce, the principal may seek funds from other sources, such as the PTA or

community organizations. The principal might even consider rotating some of the trips with the APs occasionally.

## Instructional Leader? Manager? Both?

The answer is both. Faculty and staff members, parents, and students should know that the high priority placed on planning, organizing, and facilitating the operation of the school is a responsibility shared by principals and assistant principals. Effective administration requires effective management, and APs must be part of this action. They should be placed in charge of some of the school's important projects and, with the principal's guidance and assistance, given the authority to plan, execute, and evaluate school programs.

Effective APs must be instructional leaders as well as managers, but their training seldom prepares them for this. They must see their job as being more than that of fire fighter. Instructional leaders do not oversimplify the complex task of helping teachers to perform up to the maximum level of their capacity. For example, attendance problems are best handled by providing schooling that students view as worthwhile, and discipline problems are best dealt with by getting well-qualified teachers and training them to make their teaching seem relevant and important to the students.

This is a big order—one that is accomplished by effective instructional leadership, not by wishes or prayers or speeches. APs, if carefully selected and properly trained, can be an important part of the instructional leadership process.

*Written by Kenneth E. McIntyre, professor emeritus of educational administration at the University of Texas, Austin, and member of the NASSP Council on the Assistant Principalship.*

## Working with the Assistant Principal

Are you providing your assistants with the kind of direction, help, supervision, and nurturing that will increase their chances of becoming good principals? Are you treating them as the important human resources they are?

Be honest, principals. Don't you find yourself forgetting those practices and giving in to the daily pressures by expecting assistant principals to "take care of" the loose ends—the jobs neither you nor anyone else wants to do?

As reminders, here are a few tasks that assistant principals typically do:

- Supervise bus loading/unloading
- Listen to teachers' explanations of problems they are having with students
- Telephone parents to check students' attendance
- Inform teachers of changes in students' placement
- Hear students describe their difficulties with teachers or students
- Fill out questionnaires
- Check restrooms.

How many of these are meaningful leadership activities? Is it reasonable to expect to train principals by giving them these to do for significant portions of their day? Are they helpful to the assistant principals' growth and development?

By now you may be thinking, "Someone has to do these things and it's better that assistant principals do them than principals." I agree, but I also believe principals need to discuss and consult with assistants to determine:

- Which of these activities are really necessary?
- Which activities can someone else on staff do?
- What alternatives are there to doing them and still achieve the desired results?

. . . Remember, your assistants are adults, learners, and individuals. They need care, nurturing, and support. . . .

*From "Working with Assistant Principals To Achieve Maximum Value," by Lewis Roderick. Published in the February 1986* NASSP Bulletin.

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# How To Initiate Desktop Publishing in the Principal's Office

Although desktop publishing is relatively new to the schools, its use in education has grown astronomically in the past three years. How desktop publishing is used in the school is limited only by the user's imagination and the cost of equipment.

## What Is Desktop Publishing?

Desktop publishing, as the phrase suggests, provides administrators with the ability to use computer technology—often in an area the size of a desktop—to produce school newsletters, newspapers, specialized forms, course description booklets, handbooks, concert programs, yearbooks, etc., and to do so quickly, economically, and with a high degree of quality control.

Desktop publishing is different from word processing in that the user has total control over what information will go on the page, as well as the format, type style and size, and graphics. It allows the user to make changes any time during the process—right down to the last minute—at no extra cost except the few minutes it takes to make the changes.

New information can be added or deleted, formats can be changed, type size can be decreased or increased, and illustrations can be added, taken out, or moved with the touch of a few keys. In brief, the user wears the hat of the writer, designer, typesetter, and publisher all at once.

Along with these many job descriptions come many responsibilities and decisions. The user must go through the traditional steps of writing, editing, and designing the publication, as well as making up the pages on the screen, and printing the publication.

## What To Look For

The basic components of a desktop publishing system include a personal computer, a hard disk for storage, a high resolution monitor, a mouse or other control device, a laser printer, and composition software. Software for painting and drawing is another option.

It is possible to put together a desktop publishing system for as little as $5,000 or as much as $20,000 or more, depending on the wants and needs of the user. A few basics are necessary, however:

• *The Personal Computer.* Most schools and administrators now have access to a personal computer such as an Apple or IBM. They are on the way to desktop publishing.

The type of computer used dictates the type of publishing. For example, the Macintosh is menu-controlled. That's to say, the user is presented with a "menu" of options on the screen and may choose the format, type style, type size, etc., from that menu.

On the other hand, the IBM is command-controlled. The user must know what keyboard keys to push in order to perform the desired tasks. An MS-DOS-based computer (MicroSoft-Disk Operating System) like the IBM also needs the addition of a "graphics card" to be able to run most desktop publishing programs.

The computer's power is also an important factor in choosing the right one for desktop publishing, because its power is a measure of its capability or capacity.

All computers are not alike. Be sure to carefully assess your needs before buying a personal computer; make an extensive list of what you want the computer to do and shop around. Will you be producing a weekly newsletter, monthly newspaper, quarterly bulletins, or occasional forms?

Also be sure that all of the needed components are available for the kind of computer you buy.

And, don't forget that you need a screen (also called a monitor or display device). Some personal computers include screens. If not, you must purchase one separately. Several types and sizes are available, so, again, assess your needs. If you are producing a newspaper and need to see entire pages at a time or two pages side by side, a 12" diagonal display won't be large enough.

• *The Hard Disk.* The hard disk's main purpose is document storage. It also makes access to many different types of programs from page composition to word processing relatively easy.

• *The Printer.* Even though desktop publishing is possible with a dot-matrix printer, advantages of a laser printer far outweigh their initial cost, mainly because of the visual clarity that is possible. Sometimes the quality achieved from a dot-matrix printer is so poor that using it in a desktop publishing system makes no sense. The sav-

ings seen in typesetting and printing costs during several years will more than pay for the laser printer, which will probably cost between $3,000 and $4,000 for the most basic.

• *The Software.* Regardless of what kind of personal computer and printer are used, the software is the most important component of desktop publishing. The user cannot perform publishing tasks if the software does not provide the capability.

Approximately 50 software packages are available for desktop publishing. How does the user know which will suit his or her needs best? Text composition software can be used to create standard forms such as field trip permissions and hall passes that will be reprinted and to spruce up correspondence, school newsletters, handbooks, etc. Before selecting a software package, consider the following:

1. Does the program let you compose text that is well-designed and has proportionally spaced characters? Does it have the ability to justify and hyphenate automatically? Does it allow for more than one type style or character size? Does it allow kerning (tightening the spaces between letters to improve readability) and indents of all kinds?
2. Does the software provide the "What You See Is What You Get" display format? Is what you see on the screen a good facsimile of what will come out of the printer? Can you point to specific effects you want on the screen, or do you have to type in a command?
3. Does the program create graphics? Is the relationship between the text and graphics as seamless as possible? What types of graphics and illustrations can be added (spreadsheet data, paintings, drawings, scanned images, video images)?
4. Does the software have good editing capabilities? Can you look at a composed document, identify what needs rewriting, and make changes without going from the word processor to an input file?
5. Can the computer output to at least one printer at a resolution of 300 dots per inch? (You need this type of resolution to be able to do graphics.)

More than 30 programs are available for DOS-based computers and at least 10 for Macintosh. The most popular programs are PageMaker for both types of computers, Ready-Set-Go and Quark Xpress for the Mac, and Ventura from Xerox for IBM-compatible computers. (The *NASSP Bulletin* is produced using Quark Express.)

The software package selected should be based on present and future needs and who is going to use it.

## Who Is Going To Use It?

Desktop publishing is not an easy task. The user must be trained to operate the computer and the software, become familiar with the capabilities and obstacles, and then practice, practice, practice. This training takes time.

Administrators must determine whether they are going to take on the job or offer it to someone else—the journalism teacher, a secretary, or any other interested staff members. Either way, administrators must have their eyes wide open when they become involved with desktop publishing.

Then, they might consider tackling desktop presentations, which involve paperless methods of communication, such as slides, overheads, and videos.

## The Next Step

Once you have mastered desktop publishing, you may want to move into the arena of creating desktop presentations. Desktop presentations are visual products created using desktop publishing as the driving medium and alternative processes as either enhancements to the product or allowing you different ways of delivering your presentation material. The process of creating desktop presentations will allow you to become more creative and won't limit you to just printed medium.

One way to enhance your presentation is by using a scanner that will allow you to scan (digitize) different images into your desktop publishing program. This will allow you to not only add photographs of people into your documents, but also any other printed medium that you want included in your presentation. You also have the ability to make your own color slide presentations with film recorders. This is a process that gives you the capability to make color slides created by your desktop publishing programs. And additional enhancement that lies on the horizon may be the marriage of special hardware and software that will allow you to make video presentations created with liquid crystal display technology.

No matter how involved the administrator becomes in desktop publishing, one fact remains: the school administrator will be able to communicate at a higher level and with greater control over the product quality than ever before.

*Written by Dennis Dempsey, principal at Homer High School, Homer, Alaska.*

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# How To Lobby Effectively

Lobbyist: *One who seeks to persuade a legislator to support one's cause.* — Oxford American Dictionary.

You may not yet consider lobbying to be a part of your job, but that day is rapidly approaching. You will have to become a lobbyist for survival—of your school, your district, and public education, according to principals, administrators, and state education lobbyists.

The battle for public education is being waged at the state level, according to experts, and, they say, administrators must take part in the action.

The National Center for Education Statistics points out, for example, that the percentage of school money that came from local sources fell from 57 percent to 45 percent between 1960 and 1979 and that the state share jumped from 39 percent to 46 percent.

State legislators, some critics note, are controlling not only purse strings, but curriculum, pupil/teacher ratios, working conditions for teachers, and many other aspects of school life.

"Virtually everything we do is controlled by the state, and with declining revenues, it's a must that school administrators get involved in lobbying," says Jerry Conners, a former principal and now executive director and registered lobbyist for the Nevada Association of School Administrators.

"Principals are much more comfortable going to a football game or a spaghetti supper," says an assistant superintendent. "But they are going to have to change that attitude." The prospects for adequate financing of public education are so poor, he believes, that principals soon may have to free themselves for lobbying activities by delegating to their assistants many of their day-to-day duties of running the schools.

## Lobbying: An Enlightened View

Some people still envision lobbying as a clandestine activity engaged in by a few people who exchange large sums of money in smoky back rooms—a view which may partially explain why many educators steer clear of any involvement.

But in reality, the process is quite different. It is usually open to public scrutiny, participation is welcome, and many individuals and groups vie for legislative favor. In California alone, according to one estimate, more than 600 professional lobbyists roam the halls of the state capitol seeking access to state legislators.

There's no denying that money talks in politics: witness the influence of groups that give generously to election campaigns. But legislators also pay attention to people power and issues commanding local support.

Here's where you come in.

## Lobbying: The Principal's Role

According to some estimates, about 30 to 40 percent of administrators would engage in lobbying activities—if they knew what to do. But few have received any formal training in politics.

Some state education groups are responding to this need by issuing publications and holding special seminars on political awareness. They are trying to involve not only superintendents but also principals in their political outreach efforts.

If you get involved, you may be asked to participate in activities that generally fall into two categories: formal and informal lobbying.

Most principals probably will not take part in formal lobbying at the state capitol. There are some exceptions, however. If you are active in the political arm of a state education group, you may be asked to testify on a bill, to drop in on your representatives, or to join a delegation of your colleagues at a hearing.

Full-time education lobbyists will seek your help if you, your family, or friends, know personally any legislators who could influence education bills; if you have established credibility with legislators on education issues; or if you have been successful in getting legislators to visit your school.

Why? Legislators, like most of us, trust and depend on their friends and their own experiences to help guide their choices.

Many informal lobbying activities are open to principals. Some principals, moreover, consider such activities as an extension of their traditional public relations duties.

Don Burger, assistant principal of Bonanza High School, Las Vegas, believes that principals should hold themselves responsible for building rapport with all of the people, including the legislators, in their school's geographic area.

"Most of us put out a newsletter once a month, but that's not good enough," Burger contends.

Some of his suggestions for building support for public education include:

- Finding out which service organizations meet in your geographic area and joining them.
- Constantly offering to make brief presentations about the schools to organizations, churches, clubs, and other bodies.
- Extending school services to needy groups (such as arranging for students to regularly visit retirement homes for elderly citizens).
- Inviting legislators to have lunch in the school cafeteria.

Burger advocates working through the legislative office of the state administrators organization on more formal lobbying activities, e.g., writing or calling your representatives to support or oppose proposed legislation.

What other ways can principals influence legislators? Here are some ideas:

- Work on their election campaigns.
- Cultivate a personal relationship with your representatives. One experienced lobbyist says that effective lobbying often depends on taking time to develop a long-term, personal relationship with the legislator whose influence you need.
- Encourage local officials (e.g., the mayor, city council members, county supervisors) to visit the schools to find out firsthand what's going on. They can be powerful allies for public education who can speak to legislators as elected officials.
- Invite local officials to a district-level briefing on school finances. Dennis Mangers, a former teacher, principal, and member of the California legislature, says educators need to cultivate a better informed, more committed cadre of local leaders who "understand the role that a healthy, viable school system plays in the life of our communities."
- Become involved in local service clubs, such as Rotary or Kiwanis.
- Take every opportunity to make the public aware of education's needs.

## Suggestions for Letter Writing

If you are going to write to a legislator to encourage support or oppose an education bill, how do you get maximum impact from your letter?

One guide narrows suggestions to these principles: Be courteous, be candid, be correct (don't exaggerate the plight of the schools or the effects of proposed legislation), be concise (confine your letter to a single topic; check your grammar and usage), and tell in your own words what effect the legislation will have on your school or district.

Experts offers these additional tips:

- Get to the point; keep the letter to one page.
- Type the letter unless your handwriting is clear.
- Personalize your letter. Allow some emotion to show if you feel strongly about an issue.
- Avoid negative or threatening language.

What influence can one principal have? A considerable amount, particularly if you take the time to develop a long-term, friendly relationship with your legislators *before* you have to ask them for help.

## Getting Legislators into Your School Is Half the Battle

The president and governors tour disaster areas. Writers record firsthand the birth of babies, the death of famous people, star performances, the fall of countries. Crowds go to ribbon cuttings, sports events, parades—even floods, fires, and fiascoes.

Why? Seeing is believing, and more convincing than third-hand accounts or reams of reports.

The same principle applies in trying to gain the support of legislators. You've got to get them into the schools—to see both the successes and the needs of public education.

How do you do that? Dennis Mangers offers these suggestions in *The Administrator in the Political Process: Participant or Victim* (published by the San Diego County, Calif., Office of Education):

- Write a letter inviting your representative to visit your school. Indicate what you would like the legislator to see and how long the visit will take. Tell the legislator that school board members will be on hand and that you will invite the press. Say that you will call the legislator's appointment secretary to set up a time.
- Some schools have been successful in attracting legislators by inviting them to be present for the placing of their photographs in a "VIP Gallery," a space set aside in the school for a gallery of elected officials.
- Have student leaders greet the officials; allow time for the press to take pictures and get some quick quotable quotes; give handouts on the school to officials and any accompanying aides.
- Don't stay in your office with officials; get them into the school to see students, faculty, programs, parents—the things that make your school work.
- Along with showing and telling about positive things, mention problem areas. (In a similar vein, if a legislator is going to visit only one school in the district, don't take him or her to your "showcase" school. Why then would you need more money?)
- Follow up with a letter of thanks and copies of any photographs taken during the visit.

*By Shirley Boes Neill*

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# How To Make Research Work for You

Twenty years ago Benjamin Bloom declared that society looks to the educational system to provide viable solutions to a wide variety of social ills.

However, if society demands that education develop solutions to problems, then solutions will only occur through some form of research and development program.

The public secondary school is a major source of data about students, teachers, administrators, innovative programs, and education issues in general, thus making it a ready-made research base and a source of vital information to the education community.

By becoming more research-oriented, principals may be able to use this data base to increase their school's effectiveness. This doesn't imply that principals add more tasks to an already overloaded job description; it suggests that principals refocus their attitudes toward programs, program evaluation, data collection, and data analysis.

As the public cries for more accountability in schools, program decisions will have to be supported by reliable research and statistical analysis instead of instinct. Research-based approaches will not only help give the principal credibility, in the end, research and evaluation may be the only major devices to validate educational improvement and practices.

Research programs should be practical and applicable. For example, it would be in the best interest of the principal to conduct a study of the school's effectiveness.

In testing a school's effectiveness, the principal can review a variety of data, such as attendance rates, dropout rates, suspensions, student referrals to the office, grades, and participation in school activities.

This data can be used to answer such questions as, "Is a new attendance policy needed?" or "Are discipline policies effective?"

The principal can also sample teacher, student, and community attitudes toward the school and combine this information with existing data to answer such questions as, "What is the relationship between working parents and student achievement?"

These types of studies may not be published in an educational journal, but they may shed light on school problems and help educators develop prototypes of students who are at risk, thus allowing the school or district to develop strategies to help these students.

Once principals understand the potential benefit of research in their schools, they will want to move ahead. However, as effective principals are aware, a certain amount of caution is necessary in all undertakings.

## Eliminate Potential Problems

Principals who follow the steps outlined below will be able to eliminate potential research problems, implement similar studies, and analyze the results without becoming overwhelmed by statistical analyses.

The process of conducting effective research need not be elaborate. However, it must be systematic and contain sufficient safeguards to protect people involved and the validity of the study. Principals should follow these steps:

1. Organize a study team and develop a good study design
2. Properly define the problem
3. Determine if human subjects will be used
4. Analyze the data
5. Disseminate results
6. Formulate future plans.

## The Study Design

The study design, an important component that may be overlooked, is simply a plan that ensures that the study is professionally sound and that the results will stand up under proper scrutiny.

For example, Mr. Peters has two sections of 10th grade honors English. He decides to use a different technique for teaching vocabulary in his first period class, but will continue to teach vocabulary in the traditional manner in his second period class.

If Peters compares both groups' scores on a major

examination three weeks later and discovers that his first period class' scores are higher than the second period class' scores, he may jump to the conclusion that his new method is highly successful and was the reason for the higher scores.

A proper study design would prevent this error. Peters should have pretested both groups of students prior to the experiment and again after the experiment. Using an even better study design, he could have reverted back to the traditional method with both groups after the initial study period and tested both groups again later to see if there was a reversal in learning.

In this manner, Peters could determine if one of the groups is composed of superior students and thus has an "unfair" advantage. The results will allow him to make a more valid judgment about his new method's effectiveness.

## Proper Definition of the Problem

Do you know what you are trying to find out? Often you have a good plan, but find that you are trying to do too much at once. By narrowly defining the problem, principals can focus on a specific area. Results can then be used to support or alter the program.

## Human Subjects

Federal and state safeguards are provided to individuals who are involved in research.

If human subjects are to be used, secure permission from the school board and superintendent first, then from the parents of any student subjects. Parental permission should be in writing and the participants should know that their participation is voluntary and can be terminated at any time without fear of reprisal.

## Data Analysis

Frequently, educators claim that achievement test scores are *significantly* better or that discipline problems are *significantly* down. The use of the word "significant" may be questionable in these statements.

Researchers use the term "significance" in reference to statistical measurement. When an hypothesis is said to be statistically significant, one can be assured that it will be accurate more than 96 percent of the time.

A variety of tests can determine statistical significance, including correlation analysis, analysis of variance, and Chi Square. Each of these statistical analyses has its own mathematical formula for determining significance. However, a variety of software programs can also give a comprehensive statistical analysis. This type of statistical analysis lends credence to the term "significance." It also makes the interpretation of the data in question more meaningful.

## Dissemination of Results

Often the most critical phase of a study is the dissemination of the results. During this phase the superintendent, school board members, faculty, students, and community become aware of the study and its results.

The superintendent, school board members, and those involved in the study should be the first to know the results—before they are made public.

In all cases, the research committee must also protect the anonymity of each individual involved in the study. Report that 10th graders scored above the national average rather than listing the names of the students and their scores.

## Future Plans

Every study is as good as the process that flows from the study. If a study determines that students are achieving higher results using the red spelling program, then it stands to reason that the red spelling program should be used and evaluated on a periodic basis.

If a study determines that the red spelling program is not functioning as effectively as possible, it is time to carefully examine the program, make changes, and test and evaluate to determine the effectiveness of these changes.

Principals, by becoming involved in research programs, can empirically study many of the problems facing educators. The results of these studies can lead to recommendations and practices that will contribute to school effectiveness.

Principals will no longer have to fear the research process, but can begin to use it to justify continuing programs, altering others, and present a clear picture of the school's effectiveness to the public.

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# How To Make School Assemblies Meaningful and Manageable

When you mention assemblies to most school administrators, they immediately take two steps backward, inhale a huge gulp of air, and break out in a cold sweat.

These educators have probably witnessed numerous sub-par performances in front of uninterested audiences overseen by randomly-selected monitoring teams that spend the entire assembly period checking papers, reading books, or contributing to the less-than-orderly demeanor of the assemblage.

Religious assemblies notwithstanding (that's a whole other ballgame), a simple formula will make assemblies more orderly and meaningful, and will improve the attitude the school staff members and students take with them to the auditorium or gymnasium.

Assemblies are important. They provide students and staff members with opportunities not available in the classroom. They also serve as important training grounds for teaching students how to behave properly in large groups.

## Expectations Are Important

Staff members and students must know what behavior is expected of them during assemblies.

- Make staff members and students aware of the positive expectations for assembly behavior at the beginning of the school year. State expectations clearly and simply, and explain penalties for misbehaving. Then, carry them out if the need arises.
- Provide staff members and students with ample advance notice of assemblies. At times, pre-assembly materials may be included in daily lesson plans. Also, teachers may plan their classes around the assemblies to avoid scheduling tests, special guests, or field trips during that time.
- Require all students for whom the program is being tailored to attend the assemblies. An exception may be the students whose behavior may be disruptive during the assembly.

## Make Assemblies Manageable

Disruptive students may take some or all the value away from the assembly. Cooperation from both students and staff members can make the assembly manageable.

- Identify loud and unruly students prior to the assembly and explain that proper behavior is expected of them. If the behavior is not modified, these students may forfeit future assembly privileges and/or be required to attend a special in-school suspension program during future assemblies.
- Discreetly remove disruptive students from the proceedings at the first hint of deviant behavior.
- During the assembly, a subtle, "watchful eye" scanning front and back, left and right will quickly alert the monitoring team to any "trouble spots."

If a trouble area is spotted, do not call so much attention to it that it "becomes" the assembly. A simple stare in the right direction may solve the problem; physically standing near the misbehaving student or quietly asking him or her to be quiet may be all that is needed.

- Don't ignore unruly behavior. Seldom will it go away.

## Schedule Quality Assemblies

Many factors contribute to quality, meaningful assemblies.

- Consider the scheduling of assemblies: how many, how long, how often, when during the day, when during the week, and for whom.
- Plan a structured beginning for each assembly; a formal and detailed introduction is a must and sets the tone for the assembly. This introduction may be presented by the president of the student council.
- Make sure audiovisual equipment is in good working order before the day of the assembly.
- Plan ahead. Quality assemblies that are not costly must be scheduled months in advance.
- Involve individuals or groups who will make a meaningful presentation in your school. Check their references and involve both staff members and students in the selection process.

Possible presenters include civic groups, law enforcement groups, businesspeople, local authors and personalities, and people involved with youth

groups or youth problems.

- Attend assemblies at other schools.
- Pay attention to cost. Surprisingly, you can schedule high-quality programs for little or no cost. A higher price doesn't mean a better program. Find a sponsor for your assemblies if possible. This will minimize your cost.

When an effort is made to demonstrate to staff members and students that assemblies are important and that proper behavior will be expected, they won't want to miss the programs.

School administrators will be scheduling entertaining and informative programs for attentive audiences, and presenters will leave with a positive feeling toward the school.

It takes an effort and a commitment, but you can plan meaningful, manageable assemblies.

*Written by James H. VanSciver, principal at Pocomoke High School in Worcester County, Md.*

## Some Topic Suggestions

Steven McNamara, assistant principal at Perkiomen Valley High School in Collegeville, Pa., and Patricia Dunne McNamara, educational consultant, offer the following possible assembly topics. They suggest that these topics be addressed via skits, and that they highlight various alternatives for students to consider:

**Grades 6-9**

- How to deal with rumors about yourself
- How to deal with being told by a teacher to pick up something that you didn't throw

**Grades 9-12**

- How to deal with an invitation to play hooky from school
- How to deal with pressure to smoke
- How to effectively communicate to a teacher when you disagree about something or do not understand a concept, without aggravating him or her or causing yourself to be alienated from your peers.

Obviously, this list of examples is not exhaustive, the McNamaras say, however, in an assembly program the basic model is the same:

- Present a realistic problem situation to the students
- Freeze the actors in the skit at the moment of decision
- Ask the students to predict how the situation would typically turn out
- Ask the students to generate and analyze alternative choices
- Lead the audience in the identification of the consequences of the typical situation and the alternatives
- Repeat the above process with new conflict
- Close the program by discussing and explaining the purpose of the assembly.

"This last step is critical for the application of the learning. The narrator needs to question the audience about personal benefits from the assembly and/or summarize key objectives of the program that will be followed up in classroom sessions," they explain.

*From "Assembly Programs: Solving Discipline Problems and Recognizing Alternatives," NASSP Bulletin, April 1983, pp. 115-116.*



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# How To Manage People Well

The top concern of management is—and must be—people. That's the opinion of Lawrence Appleby, chairman emeritus of the American Management Association.

Management, in his view, is "unquestionably a matter of individual example for the purpose of inspiring good practice by other people."

What happens, or doesn't happen, in a school depends on the people who work there. These people take their cue from the principal—the manager of the school.

But, as principals know, managing people well is no easy task. In the words of one principal: "To be a good school manager, you sometimes have to step on people's shoes. The trick is to do so without messing up their shine."

## All Things To All People?

In the course of managing people, school principals are at times called on to be: models, planners, coaches, advisers, friends, facilitators of change and, in the final analysis, the bosses.

The successful manager of people, according to management experts, exhibits certain characteristics. Topmost are fairness, consistency, firmness, caring, tact, a sense of purpose, a positive mental attitude, self-confidence, and common sense.

Some would add to the list a sense of humor; others would add knowing what's important and acting accordingly.

## What To Do; What To Avoid

Management can be either positive and constructive or negative and destructive. The former obviously is a better course for school managers who sometimes have to inspire teachers and other staff members to help achieve goals they may not wholeheartedly support.

Effective principals lead; they don't manipulate. They help teachers set goals, then they encourage and advise them. Principals attain their own goals by relating them to the genuine wants, needs, and aspirations of teachers. The result can be a program that is "ours," rather than one that is "the principal's."

One thing the principal does not want to do is to play politics. It results in "them against us" situations, backbiting, discord, open rebellion, or passive resistance.

What can you do to enhance the working relationship with your staff as well as among staff members?

Here are recommendations from successful educators:

**Learn, sharpen, use good communication skills.**

- Be clear in stating what you want, what you expect, how you will help achieve the school's objectives. Give teachers the chance to do the same.
- Create the opportunity and the atmosphere for a solid exchange of ideas among staff members.
- Set aside time to communicate, away from the interruptions of your daily routine, to talk with teachers about matters of importance.
- Find out how *all* staff members—not just the vocal groups—feel about important issues. A formal or informal annual opinion survey of staff would be very useful.
- Inform people ahead of time about proposed changes. Explain new goals, policies, and procedures before they are implemented. Don't depend on the grapevine to get the word around.
- Follow up in a reasonable amount of time on all employee suggestions and complaints. Don't shoot down suggestions and complaints without an investigation. Give credit publicly for suggestions which will be adopted. Explain why others must be rejected.
- Recognize that open, give-and-take communication requires more time. Avoid frustration by allowing for it.

**Plan, organize, delegate.**

- Don't rely on luck. Get the facts and have the foresight to plan well. Pay attention to detail.
- Have both long-range and short-range plans for the school.
- Take time to reflect on the most compelling needs facing the school.
- Accommodate staff members who wish to have greater responsibility than supervising the study hall or patrolling the halls.
- Delegate meaningful responsibilities.

**Emphasize quality.**

- Let staff members know you want the best possible education for students in your school.
- Expect excellence.
- Support excellence.
- Praise excellence.
- Reward excellence.

**Set an example.**

- Abide by the rules you set for staff.
- Be as well organized as possible.
- Do not preach dedication and "giving that little extra" to the school and then be the last to arrive in the morning, the first to leave in the afternoon, the one who "sneaks out" with golf clubs in tow.
- Keep up-to-date on education changes, innovations.
- Dress the part of a principal.
- Stay in good physical shape.
- Avoid gossip, bad-mouthing, and making excuses for ineptness.
- Seek professional help when it is needed.
- Don't pass the buck.

**Be visible.**

- Take time—make time—to get into classrooms.
- Teach a class now and then.
- Get away from your desk and into the outer office at the opening and closing of each school day.
- Increase the number of informal contacts with staff. Show up in the faculty lounge or lunchroom. Meet informally with different staff members several days each week.

**Facilitate staff growth.**

- Find out what motivates different staff members; build on it.
- Involve teachers in decisions which affect them; give them opportunities to gain ownership in school programs.
- Let teachers assist in planning and serve as leaders in staff development efforts.

*A Leader is . . . best*
*When people barely know he exists.*
*Not so good*
*When people obey and acclaim him.*
*Worse when they despise him.*
*But of a good leader*
*Who talks little*
*When his work is done*
*His aim fulfilled*
*They will say*
*"We did it ourselves."*

Lao-Tae
565 B.C.

- Give teachers opportunities for peer recognition, collegial planning, and significant group contributions to instructional efforts.
- Cherish people with ideas. Remember that creative people are generally the most sensitive. When they offer ideas you must reject, don't do so in a heavy-handed fashion.
- Recognize jobs well done by staff members in bulletins or newsletters and at meetings of the staff and the board of education.
- Recommend teachers as speakers at conferences, parents' night, or school board meetings.
- Arrange for teachers to visit the classrooms of peers who do an outstanding job.

*This material was prepared by Shirley Boes Neill, an education writer in Carmichael, California.*

**Advice from a Top Manager**

Here are some points to ponder. They were learned by Frederick C. Crawford during his 65 years of business experience with TRW, Inc. Recently inducted into *Fortune* magazine's National Business Hall of Fame, Crawford is noted for "an uncanny feel for human relations."

His advice, adapted for schools and principals:

✓ Use common sense.

✓ Don't widen the gulf between you and staff members. Bridge it by gaining their trust. Recognize the importance of job security and that workers want to feel needed, to know they are part of a team.

✓ Create harmony with staff members by getting across the message that you are genuinely interested in them. The Golden Rule and communication are the key to harmony.

✓ Remember that one of your most important jobs as a manager is to provide inspirational leadership. Along the way, don't lose sight of the fact that there isn't just one way of doing something.

✓ Cultivate a sense of urgency of getting on with (school) business. Invariably it's better to do something—even if it proves to be not the best possible thing—than to do nothing at all.

✓ Finally, assess your skills as a manager and the state of your school by imagining that you've been RIFfed or replaced by a new principal. Imagine watching how he or she deals with staff. Upon observing, you may find yourself saying: "I could have done that. The new principal isn't doing anything that I couldn't have done." Then do it.

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# How To Manage Time: Thirteen Techniques for School Administrators

Scarcity makes time a precious resource—once it is used, there are no recall procedures. School administrators, like all managers, must use their time efficiently and effectively. Time management techniques can provide the means to harness this most precious resource.

Managing time effectively provides more time for educational leadership. Good time managers handle routine functions quickly and efficiently, leaving more time for important educational matters. Administrators who spend most of their time on office busy work send a message that "running a smooth ship" is of utmost importance, and teacher behavior will reflect that tone.

## Thirteen Time Management Techniques

Many books and articles document time management practices. The following practices can help school administrators:

**1. Log How You Spend Your Time.** A log or diary is the starting point to regain control of your time. By keeping a diary or time log, you can analyze how you spend your time (Van Loozen, 1982). When administrators find out how they actually use their time, they are usually surprised.

**2. Plan.** Planning is of critical importance. Stevens (1984) breaks planning into these steps:

- *List and analyze the tasks* for which you are responsible.
- *Establish priorities.* Priority setting involves questioning yourself. You should determine which tasks are most important, which have time boundaries, and which can be completed at a later date.
- *Plan a sequence and a timeline.* This helps you to pace yourself realistically.
- *Begin work by doing high priority things first.* Don't fall into the trap of always handling the easier items first.

**3. Identify Time Wasters.** The Association of California School Administrators (1979) lists the most common time wasters:

- Signing documents
- Drop-in visitors
- Lack of delegation
- Lack of planning
- Unclear communications
- Inability to say "No"
- Commuting time
- Paperwork
- Indecision
- Interruptions
- Meetings
- Tradition
- Junk mail
- Television
- Telephone

A manager must be aware of these specific time wasters to develop strategies to rectify them. For example, sign all documents at specific times during the day; have someone else open the mail; limit the number of new projects accepted; and go to the other person's office to hold the meeting.

**4. Use Secretarial Assistance Wisely.** Give your secretary the authority to schedule your calendar—after you have cleared your time.

Secretaries should know your goals, priorities, and general time management plans. Often they can suggest positive ways to streamline or eliminate ineffective procedures that you have missed (Burden, 1981). Asking the secretary to buzz you 20 minutes after someone enters your office is a dodge that gives you the option of gracefully closing a conversation.

**5. Avoid the Rolls Royce Syndrome.** Administrators who feel they *must* do better than required can be characterized as having the Rolls Royce syndrome (Steinmetz, 1976). Although the Rolls Royce is the best-quality automobile in the world, most people can fulfill their basic purpose in owning a car far less expensively. The individual must decide when the best costs too much.

Other managers waste time because they get caught in the perfection trap (Paulson, 1983). Perfection leads to procrastination. While striving for excellence, administrators should not wait for the perfect thought, action, or time. Often just the fear of failure will keep some from beginning projects. Rarely is putting off important projects an ineffective time management practice.

**6. Know Yourself.** You need to understand your values, needs, beliefs, attitudes, and habits in relation to time (Burden, 1981). For example, identify the time of the day when you work most effectively. Knowing your time orientation will help you develop a work plan that suits your personality.

**7. Periodically Take a Break.** Taking short breaks to recharge your battery can pay long-term benefits (ACSA, 1979). A coffee break or even a walk around the school

might be enough. After a break you are more alert and better able to concentrate; thus, the quality of the time you spend in the office should improve.

**8. Delegate.** Delegation is a critical time management skill—although the most difficult to master. Steinmetz (1976) believes that a manager should ask, "Could someone else do the job sufficiently well?" If so, then somebody else should do it.

Delegation frees the administrator from less-important details to concentrate on the essentials (Miller and Miller, 1979). Interestingly, subordinates' job satisfaction improves with increased responsibilities. The result of delegation is higher productivity.

**9. Vary Your Schedule.** You can keep your job from becoming monotonous or boring by varying the time set aside for certain projects (Hayes, 1978). Experiment with different schedules to determine when your concentration and interest are highest. Identifying your biorhythmic cycles to spot high and low energy levels can also be helpful (Mali, 1978).

**10. Set Aside Time for Creative Thinking.** Not setting aside time for creative thinking and developing innovative plans allows routine duties to consume your time (Haimann and Hilgert, 1982). A minimum of 10 percent of your time should be spent on creative activities.

**11. Make the Most of Meetings.** Everyone complains that meetings are time wasters, yet most organizations cannot operate without meetings. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to avoid useless meetings and to use meeting time effectively. Some time-saving devices to keep meetings on track include:

- Have a well-developed agenda
- Establish a time limit on topics
- Pause periodically to consult the agenda and remind the group of what has been accomplished and what remains to be discussed
- Schedule meetings at times when participants will be least likely to want the meeting to run overtime.

**12. Use Personal Time-Saving Devices.** Some inexpensive yet proven personal time-saving devices and approaches include: portable tape recorders (to dictate notes, reminders, etc.); a clean desk; memo pads; directories; bulletin boards (for lists of future projects, projects in progress, and completed projects); appointment books; a closed office door; and the ability to say "No."

**13. Learn To Use the Computer.** The time spent developing a working knowledge of the computer will pay dividends (Stevens, 1984). The computer allows personnel records, letters, and forms to be retained for easy use. Even administrators with a craft-cultural orientation (as opposed to a technocratic orientation) can use the computer effectively. The more you learn and work with a computer, the more time you can save.

**A Final Note**

Some managers fear that time management practices will make their lives mechanical and unspontaneous (Geering, 1980). Actually, the opposite is true. Administrators who use these practices have more time for creative thinking and strategic planning.

Managers who save time can invest that time to develop relationships with employees. Further, successful time managers do not lose their flexibility even when the best of plans go awry.

You must also plan time for yourself and for the personal part of your life. Administrators need time for self-renewal. Regardless of the demands of the job, you must maintain a proper balance between work and family, demands and leisure, and stress and recreation. Without such balance, you may simply have no time to manage.

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# How To Motivate Staff

CONSIDER:

- Between 1970 and 1979, public school enrollment decreased almost 10 percent and approximately 3,800 schools were closed or consolidated.
- School districts were forced to lay off thousands of teachers—23,800 in 1978-79 alone.
- The effect on aspiring teachers was predictable. Specifically: In 1971, more college students graduated with degrees in education than in any other field. Eight years later, business/management replaced education as the most popular field.

These facts add up to one conclusion for many school principals: The staff employed this year will be the staff employed for years to come—with little turnover, no new blood. Taking this scenario one step further, the result could be a stale staff devoid of new ideas, freely admitting to "burnout," overly concerned with retaining their jobs but secure in the knowledge that tenure and union contracts will, in most cases, prevent dismissal.

## No Easy Job, But Worth the Effort

The era of decline demands that principals sharpen their job skills. One skill in particular—motivating staff members to perform well—is particularly important.

How about schools in which enrollment is stable or growing? Their principals, too, must be concerned about motivation.

Timothy C. Quinn, a former principal, says about motivation: "It's the difference between . . . good and poor teachers. . . . Where motivation exists, growth occurs. Where growth occurs, there are happy and fulfilled people."

School principals know, however, that motivating some teachers and other staff members to reach a desirable goal can be a frustrating, fruitless task.

Then, why try? Again, Quinn has an answer: "Motivation, goal achievement, and growth are habit forming, and they enhance self-concept." (November 1978 issue of *The NASSP Practitioner.*)

What happens if teachers are not motivated, not excited about teaching? If it is true that "enthusiasm is caught, not taught," a dull, unmotivated teacher may breed a similar attitude among students.

## What Can Motivate a Person?

Apparently, an infinite variety of factors—challenge, recognition, money, power, personal values, the desire for change, fear, love, assurance of a job well done—can motivate a person.

Often, motivation comes from within, as illustrated by this teacher's comment:

> "I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or dehumanized."
>
> —Haim Ginott *Between Teacher and Child*

What about teachers who don't have this inner motivation? They may be willing to try to change because of the positive, sustaining interest and influence of their principal.

Sometimes, principals can motivate through fear. More likely, teachers are motivated because they respect their principal and vice versa.

- The principal must be sensitive to and responsive to the needs and values of individual teachers.
- Once needs are known and values clarified, the principal should work with teachers to establish goals and to figure out how they can be attained.
- Problems must be stated in concrete terms, not just "you've got to improve your teaching."
- The school climate must be conducive to doing a good job. The basics in this area include: Establishing opportunities for regular communication with staff members, setting clear standards so teachers know what is expected of them, involving staff members in decisions that affect them, not playing favorites, and recognizing a job well done.

## What's a Principal To Do?

Even with the stage all set, the main actor—the teacher—may still be unmotivated to perform. What's a principal to do?

At this point, the experts advise going back to square one: Identifying what will motivate a particular individual.

Superintendent M. Donald Thomas of Salt Lake City cites a number of possible motivators:

- **Love, affection, security.** Some staff members want to know they are doing a good job, they are valued, they are accepted. A compliment, a few words of thanks, and a statement of reassurance produce a high degree of motivation for persons in this category.

- **Self-esteem.** Some staff members want to know they are important. Don't embarrass, ridicule, or diminish these persons.
- **A challenge, competition, achievement.** These people need to be told that although their work is difficult, they are achieving at a high level. High achievers, moreover, must be given broader assignments, more difficult tasks, and increased responsibility.
- **Recognition.** Some people need recognition of achievement many times during the school year.
- **Material rewards.** Some people are especially motivated by more money, power, leadership opportunities. Merit pay and bonuses, if available, may motivate these individuals.
- **Personal satisfaction.** Some persons value independence highly. They want to be told what is expected; they will perform well if left alone.

If that list still leaves you wishing for concrete, ready-to-use-right-now motivators, here are additional ideas that work for some principals:

✓ Create opportunities for teachers to have more contact with other adults. Establish and participate in a daily jog, bike, or walk-a-thon, or exercise class. Find ways for teachers to visit the classrooms of peers in other schools, in other districts.

✓ Create opportunities for teachers to gain recognition from other adults. Arrange for them to teach their peers or other adults. Invite teachers to testify on educational matters at school board meetings, to star in show-and-tell sessions for a districtwide audience.

✓ Ask the superintendent or board members to visit your school and to take time to talk with individual teachers about what they are doing in their classrooms.

✓ Select a panel of super teachers to go onstage at a districtwide get-together and be interviewed by administrators about their special teaching talents.

✓ Write a note of commendation when a teacher accomplishes a particularly difficult job and put it in the teacher's mailbox.

✓ Encourage and support teachers who want to try out new ideas.

✓ Encourage teachers to attend professional meetings; pay all or part of their expenses, if possible.

## Motivation Checklist

Use the checklist to pinpoint ideas and motivators that may work with your staff:

___ Do you invite participation in decisions that affect staff?

___ Do you share the rationale for decisions made, except personal matters?

___ Do you delegate challenging tasks and responsibilities?

___ Do you regularly reinforce staff for positive job performance?

___ Do you vary the approach you use with people?

___ Do you operate on the premise that most people will work hard and be self-motivated?

___ Do you accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative?

___ Do you solicit employee suggestions, and then take them seriously?

___ Do you look for ways to meet individual needs of teachers, when necessary, on a one-to-one basis?

___ Do you stress team effort?

___ Do you let *your* enthusiasm shine through?

___ Do you frequently use these words: "Good job"; "Well done"; "What do you think?"; "You count"; "Thank you"?

*Written by Shirley B. Neill, Carmichael, Calif.*

### Ideas from a Top Teacher

A recent Teacher of the Year, Beverly Bimes of Hazelwood Schools, St. Louis, offers these suggestions for revitalizing teachers:

• Help teachers get in touch with themselves. Set aside time for teachers to talk through their frustrations together and to look at themselves on paper. By asking teachers to complete a self-assessment worksheet in a nonthreatening environment and to focus on how they "slice up" their classroom time, teachers can gain new insight about themselves and their profession.

"When they realize that many of their fellow teachers have the same problems, they are encouraged to seek solutions together," Bimes says.

• Sponsor a series of concrete activities that can make teachers aware of the importance of time management. Once teachers discover they may be wasting time, Bimes suggests, they will benefit from visits to classes of effective colleagues.

• Provide continuous opportunities for professional growth by sponsoring useful inservice activities. Bimes suggests that districts provide released time for teachers to attend such activities, rather than scheduling them after school hours.

Also in the realm of inservice, Bimes suggests that schools set up "pedagogical service stations" where teachers can stop daily and get their "tanks filled" and their "batteries recharged."

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*Tips for Principals* from NASSP

# How To Plan for Effective Instructional Use of Microcomputers

"The planning necessary to implement computer use should be based on one fundamental ground rule: Start with the curriculum, not with computing."

Those wise words come from Ken Brumbaugh and Don Rawitsch of the Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium, perhaps the nation's best known producer and distributor of education software.

You may be saying at this point: "Well, that's good advice for beginners. But we've already bought machines, we've had some inservice training, and we're using computers for many instructional purposes."

Read on.

## Planning: Fluid, Necessary

The experts point out that (1) you can't afford not to plan and (2) planning is a "fluid process."

The current status of your computer education program should not be the factor you use to decide whether to develop or forego a plan. Whether you are acquiring your second or your twentieth microcomputer, you can use them more effectively if your decisions about the choice of equipment and their use are based on a written plan.

You will need to develop *and* maintain staff and community support. They are more apt to support you if they feel you know where you're headed.

## Where Do You Start?

If you subscribe to the ground rule laid down by Brumbaugh and Rawitsch, you'll want to learn more about the planning model they recommend.

Basically the model has three steps:

**Step 1:** Analyze the current curriculum, perhaps by subject area, to identify content, skills, and attitudes. This represents what educators want to do for students.

**Step 2:** Determine what kinds of instructional activities are possible using computers.

**Step 3:** Compare the curriculum desires with the computer capabilities to find where matches occur. These are the places where computing fits the curriculum well. There are many areas of the curriculum where computing does not fit.

## A Second Approach

Another way to plan for the instructional use of computers is detailed in *Principal's Planning Guide for Microcomputers*, developed by the Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the Michigan Intermediate Media Association. (The guide is now out of print.)

These two organizations advocate the use of a cyclic process *and* your involvement, as principal, in planning.

The process can be used if your school already has micros and an established program. You would simply enter the cycle at a different point.

The process requires you to answer the following questions:

**1. Which of the building's curriculum goals and objectives are to be enhanced by the introduction of microcomputers?**

- Have all content areas been considered?
- What specific objectives within each content area have been identified?
- Why are computers the best means of achieving these objectives?

**2. What instructional outcomes are expected? How will achievement of these outcomes be measured?**

- Will it be used: to motivate? to remediate? to assess achievement? for enrichment? for individualization? to improve attendance? for diagnosis?
- What evaluation instruments will be used?
- What criteria have been established to determine the degree of achievement of the objectives?

**3. What instructional software and/or process will be used to achieve the desired outcomes?**

- How much does a program or package cost?
- Is the software well documented, i.e., are printed instructions provided?
- Are printed support materials provided, e.g., sample lesson plans?
- Is the software easy to use, i.e., can students use it without full-time adult supervision?
- Are the materials instructionally sound?
- Does the program represent appropriate use of the computer, e.g., could the objectives be accomplished more easily by other means?

**4. What considerations have been made in preparation for purchase of microcomputer hardware?**
- Will the computer run the software selected?
- Where will the microcomputers be housed?
- Is the system expendable?
- What peripherals (e.g., printers, modems) are necessary?
- Is service available?
- Are screen displays easily read?
- How will maintenance be handled?
- Is the system easy to set up and use?
- Cost? Can a cooperative purchase be made?
- Is the hardware compatible with other machines in the district? Should it be?

**5. What inservice has been planned with staff?**
- What level of teacher competence is necessary?
- What university resources are available?
- How much time is required and when will it be provided?
- Are there resource people inside the building (or within the district)?
- What periodicals on educational computing are available within the building?
- Are "hands-on" experiences included?
- How will equipment be made available for home use?
- Can participants borrow software?
- Is the library adequate?
- How will inservice be offered to parents?

**6. Were the intended outcomes achieved?**
- Was the evaluation tool adequate?
- How should the system be modified for the next round?

**7. What additional applications should be considered?**
- Administrative use after school hours?
- Classroom management?
- Energy use control?
- Information networks?
- Word processing?
- Utility programs, e.g., statistical programs?

**8. What modifications to the curriculum goals and/or additional applications should be considered?**
- What new goals and objectives should be considered?

**Note:** At this point the cycle starts again.

## Basic Considerations

Taking the time to involve a staff committee in the development of a plan could actually speed up full implementation of your program and prevent it from becoming disjointed, confusing, and unsupported.

Such a committee should include teachers and other personnel from a wide variety of grades and departments. Don't allow the committee to be dominated by persons from one discipline area, experts advise.

And, although you will probably need to turn most of the details and the chair of the committee over to someone else, keep in touch. Your visibility and interest lend the official aura necessary to complete the plan and implement it effectively.

Your plan will need to reflect your school goals, the amount of hardware and software you have, your budget, anticipated future support, your school enrollment, and the sophistication of your staff in using micros.

Another important factor to consider is the district level plan. If there isn't one, you may want to join with other interested persons districtwide in persuading central office administrators to move in that direction.

Finally, remember to consider whatever plan you develop as more temporary than permanent. Whether your plan is for one year or for five, according to one educator, it will go through four stages in its lifetime: initiation, support, implementation, and revision.

Many factors will determine how quickly you will need to revise your plan, a prime one being the rapid changes taking place in the computer industry.

### Make Budget Realistic

Don't underestimate the cost of making micros part of your instructional program. This is easy to do if you simply calculate the costs on the basis of newspaper ads for computer hardware.

The advertised price is quite often only that for minimal hardware, according to Brumbaugh and Rawitsch. You can quickly add 50 percent or more to the base price when you ask for extra hardware, software packages, maintenance contracts, and related support materials.

The two Minnesotans offered the following sample instructional computing budget:

| *Item* | *% of Total* |
|---|---|
| Equipment (basic unit) | 66 |
| Hardware peripherals | 12 |
| Software | 12 |
| Maintenance | 5 |
| Miscellaneous | 5 |

*by Shirley Boes Neill*

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# How To Publish a School Newsletter

An informative, attractive school newsletter can be a big boost to your school's information and public confidence program. A school newsletter, if done poorly, is *not* better than not doing one at all. If you make the decision and investment to produce a school newsletter, follow these guidelines.

## What Is Your Purpose?

Frequently newsletters are started because other schools have them or because the superintendent wants one. But before you begin, ask what the newsletter will do for your school program and students.

Newsletters carry information to their readers; some even strive to change the behavior of their audiences. They ask people to volunteer for a parent activity, give their opinion on new issues, and praise their teachers for a job well done.

The key question, then, is what difference will this newsletter make for its readers. Write objectives to define the purpose of your newsletter.

## Who Is Your Audience?

You need to pinpoint your audience as soon as you begin to plan your newsletter.

Most school newsletters are sent to parents, guardians, staff, students, and central office personnel. Some principals send it to houses located near their schools (their neighbors), "key communicators" in their attendance area, government officials, staff of feeder schools, parents of the upcoming freshmen, and the local media.

The key, however, is to determine the target audience—probably parents—and to write the newsletter with them in mind.

## What Should You Say?

After you decide on the target audience and purpose of the newsletter, you need to decide what the newsletter should say.

Aim the content at your target audience. Most parents want to know about (1) progress of their student, (2) what is being taught, (3) how it is being taught, and (4) what outside experts are saying about your school's program.

Of course, parents also need general information about upcoming events, new policies, and special counseling programs.

One principal tracks major education issues receiving media coverage and then makes sure his newsletter covers those issues throughout the year. In the last year, he has included stories on discipline, scholastic eligibility requirements for sports, and tips for parents with latchkey kids.

## What Size Should It Be?

It is best to keep your newsletter short and simple. An 8½" × 11" sheet printed on both sides is usually sufficient for a principal's newsletter to parents. If you keep it attractive, neat, well-organized, timely, accurate and *regular*, that's all you'll need. Plan to publish it at least monthly with special issues for events needing extra attention during the year.

## Should It Be Designed by a Professional?

The answer is maybe. The design element of your newsletter should strive for clarity and simplicity. Busy parents won't spend a great deal of time reading a lengthy, unattractive newsletter.

Some principals call on a graphic artist to design the banner on the front and also to lay out the first issue. The banner—usually in two colors—is then preprinted for a year's distribution and each issue is printed in the school's or district's print shop.

Many principals use typewriters or word processors to "set" the type in their newsletter. If you choose that route, follow these tips:

- Use generous margins, up to about 7/8 of an inch.
- Single space the story itself and double space between paragraphs.
- *Keep paragraphs no longer than eight lines.*
- Double space between a headline and the story.

- Triple space between the end of one story and the headline of the next story.
- *Don't handletter headlines;* use art transfer type available at a good art supply store.
- *Don't use italics* (except possibly for short captions), or script type.
- Use a pica typewriter, preferably with serif type.

## Should It Take on an Educator Style?

With all deference to educators, absolutely not.

Keep the newsletter jargon free. Use simple words, short sentences, short paragraphs, action verbs, and the active voice.

Write to express, not to impress. Avoid using acronyms and abbreviations as most people (your readers) outside education won't understand what they mean. Be sure to add direct quotes where possible and try to include a positive tone in all your copy.

Be consistent. Establish a style and stick with it. Consider using a style book and make sure a copy of it is in your school library.

Don't expect your readers to work. They won't take the time to unravel a complicated line of reasoning and they won't read "between the lines." What you want them to know must be spelled out in black and white.

Here's an example of what not to write: "As the instructional leader of the new innovative curriculum established in the Woodrow Wilson Learning Center, Ms. Smith began prioritizing the work stations with their respective recipients." Better said: "Guidance counselor Carolyn Smith, a leader in the new career guidance system in our library, is now working with 10th grade students to select their possible career choices."

## Who's in Charge of the Newsletter?

As principal, you are! But you may want to assign an editor to coordinate the entire project. Look at your staff and decide whose skills meet your needs. Often English or journalism teachers are contracted as editors, but other staff members may also do the job for you.

You need an editor who can write, has a sense of what your readers want, and is sensitive to school-community issues. If you go outside your staff for an editor, make sure that the sensitivity issue is tackled early on in your discussions.

If you use an editor, make sure you give him or her some authority along with the responsibility. Establish timelines and review and planning sessions so no one is surprised when the newsletter comes off the press.

## What's the Best Method of Distribution?

Research tells us that after fifth grade most students do not take the newsletter home. Most secondary students toss them in corridors, lockers, or school buses. Consider mailing the newsletters using the economical third class, non-profit, bulk rate. Perhaps your parent group could help by paying the mailing costs.

If you can't afford to mail, think about using student groups to deliver it throughout the community. Instead of selling candy, magazines, or cakes, offer to pay students for every 100 copies that are delivered. Keep the cost lower than the post office rate, but make it worthwhile for the student groups.

Place yourself or friends on the mailing list to "test" the delivery accuracy of your distribution system.

## Is Anybody Reading It?

After a year of publication, review the objectives and purposes of your newsletter. Were the objectives met?

At a parent meeting, ask parents what they think of the newsletter and how it could be improved. Put together an advisory council of parents to review up to six issues and ask them what's good and what needs improvement.

Evaluation will make your newsletter better, so don't avoid this important last step.

Further information about producing a school newsletter is available from the public information office of NASSP or by contacting the National School Public Relations Association in Arlington, Va.

*Written by Rich Bagin, director of association development for the National School Public Relations Association in Arlington, Va.*

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# How To Reduce Teacher Absenteeism

Teacher absenteeism, like student absenteeism, can have repercussions throughout schools and the entire education process. Such impact requires that school boards and administrators give teacher attendance high educational priority.

Because of its complexity, however, no single recommendation can be cited as the most effective measure to reduce absenteeism. Each school district must decide which policies most effectively meet its needs.

## At the District Level

Involving upper and middle level school management is a crucial step in reducing teacher absenteeism. Elliott, in an *NASSP Practitioner,* notes that teacher attendance improved dramatically in school districts where administrators at appropriate levels were involved in teacher attendance programs.

Some of the ways district-level administrators can combat teacher absenteeism are:

- Be alert to teacher applicants with poor attendance records
- Discuss school district absentee policies and standards with applicants and emphasize the importance of good attendance
- Provide consultation services to teachers to alleviate or reduce personal or organizational problems/factors that influence absenteeism.

Because teacher absenteeism cannot be completely alleviated, districts can also develop alternatives to hiring substitute teachers, such as team teaching, using community volunteers and guest speakers, and having honor students teach younger students; and use educational television and films.

## At the School Level

The principal is the single most important factor in teacher attendance programs, and teacher absenteeism is best reduced when principals approach teacher attendance in a positive manner.

In addition to congratulating teachers for maintaining perfect or near-perfect attendance, principals should also consider the following guidelines used in some schools:

1. Recognize that a problem exists and be aware of some of the causes and ramifications
2. Recognize excessive and chronic absentee patterns
3. Manage the problem through good personnel practices such as tactfulness and fairness
4. Establish school objectives regarding staff absence
5. Concentrate efforts on employees with excessive absence
6. Review cases requiring special attention with supervisors
7. Make absence records part of personnel records
8. When interviewing potential teachers during the preemployment process, stress the importance of attendance
9. Consider incentives to encourage good attendance
10. Conduct research about working conditions, attitudes, and other factors that relate to good attendance, and use the results to formulate a plan of action against excessive teacher absenteeism.

Formal attendance guidelines should include the school board's policy statement on attendance, the specific time teachers should arrive and depart each day, the procedure(s) for reporting absences, the method(s) for dealing with those who are chronically absent, and the rewards for teachers who maintain good attendance records.

## Rewarding Good Attendance

The Educational Research Service several years ago compiled a list of incentives that school administrators should consider:

- Establish a sick leave bank in which employees can deposit unused sick leave and withdraw it after certain stipulations are met
- Develop a policy of unlimited sick leave or allow the unlimited accumulation of unused sick leave
- Buy back unused sick leave, in whole or in part, at the end of a stipulated period
- Convert unused sick leave days to personal or vacation leave days
- Allow certificated school employees to transfer unused sick leave days from one school system to another when changing employment.

Other suggestions are that teacher recognition plans should have specific time frames and also include such rewards as letters of appreciation, dinners, cash awards, paid tuition for courses, and attendance at special workshops.

## The Basic Elements

A program initiated by the Antioch (Ill.) Community Consolidated School District illustrates the elements of an attendance program. The district school board compiled

absentee records for all staff members and implied that action would be taken on dismal absentee rates; made attendance one element of teacher evaluation; required teachers to call their principals directly to report and to justify their absences; and proportionally distributed remaining funds from the district substitute monies to teachers who missed fewer than six days each year of a two-year contract (Skidmore, 1984). Teacher absenteeism in the school district was reduced markedly.

In addition to attendance records, attendance profiles can be established to help teachers improve attendance. These profiles can include routine employee identification data such as name, position, salary level, and other employment data; dates of and reasons for absences; and a tally of the teacher's absences for the current month, the year, and for the duration of the teacher's tenure.

## Summary

Research and the practical experiences of a number of school districts across the country offer suggestions and recommendations for curtailing teacher absenteeism. Each district must be careful to implement programs that best serve its individual needs.

The formulation of school board policy or the revision of existing policy relative to teacher attendance is the first important step in implementing teacher attendance programs. The involvement and commitment of school administrators is another crucial factor in the success of the effort.

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*Written by Lenoar Foster, dean of students, Monague Catholic High School, Reno, Nev., and George Foldesy, associate professor and chair, Department of Educational Administration and Higher Education, University of Nevada-Reno.*

### Characteristics of the Problem

A complex problem like mounting absenteeism cries for solution. But we must begin with what is known in order to find clues to causes and possible solutions. Here are some general descriptive findings about teacher absences:

- Paid sick leave is the widest-held fringe benefit in the country.
- The rate of teacher absence increases from September until May. (*Teacher Absenteeism,* American Association of School Personnel Administrators, Seven Hills, Ohio, 1980.)
- The highest rate of absenteeism occurs on Monday and Friday.
- Absenteeism has continued to increase since the passage of collective bargaining legislation despite better pay, smaller classes, and more appropriate assignments.
- Demographic factors including salary and marital status do not have a significant impact on absenteeism.
- High levels of absenteeism occur in school districts where there are low levels of faculty agreement about the goals and policies of the community and district (even when the material incentives are high and physical conditions are pleasant).
- Absenteeism is reduced when there are smaller sub-units within the school and the teachers in those units are interdependent.
- Lower levels of teacher absence are associated with reporting procedures that require the teacher to speak directly with the immediate supervisor.

*From "Update on Absenteeism," by Peggy Gordon Elliott.* The Practitioner, *March 1982.*

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# How To Revitalize the High School Library/Media Center

Typically, students and teachers use the library* to complete assignments, study, check out equipment, and fulfill a school requirement for mandatory library orientation.

Administrators who believe a library should be more must first help establish more effective communication between the librarian, staff members, and students. One way to create this dialog is to help the librarian develop programs that will create more interest in using the library.

To revitalize the library and make it an important contribution to the educational program, administrators should consider implementing some of the following ideas:

- *Film Day.* Once a week, during lunch or during a specific class period, the librarian shows a film or videotape in the library or projection room. Mini-series videotapes are good in this type of situation and longer series like *Roots, The Holocaust, The Blue and Gray,* and *Shogun* can spark interest in reading and the library.

In addition, teachers can send some students to view the films during the day and concentrate their own time on students who need extra help. This provides a real service to the teacher and gets more students to the library to become familiar with the facility.

- *Varsity Readers Program.* The librarian, often with the input of the language arts department teachers and the reading specialist, establishes reading criteria for all grades.

Certificates or some type of school letters can be used as rewards (with PTA or Boosters Club funding) for students who check out a number of books on a regular basis.

Rules for winning the awards might include a two-book check-out limit and a minimum five-day sign-out period before books can be exchanged. This type of limit prevents students from taking advantage of the program by checking out 30 books at one time just to get a letter or award.

Students can also receive credit in some programs for using other media offered by the library.

Some record keeping is necessary with this program. The librarian can keep a separate file for varsity readers and write down the names of the books each student reads. The student can also keep a record card that the librarian can initial when a book has been read.

- *Speaker Day.* Once a week the librarian schedules a speaker in the library during lunch, during classes, or both. These speakers—community or staff members—can talk to the students about hobbies, careers, or other topics of interest.

Teachers must be encouraged to let the librarian know the number of students who will be sent to the library so the best seating arrangement can be planned. These speaker days may be so popular that often the auditorium may be the only room that can accommodate the spectators.

If once a week is too often for this type of program, it can easily be changed to a monthly, quarterly, or semester program.

- *Class Competition.* This competition revolves around the number of students from each class (freshman, sophomore, etc.) who check out a book during a specific period of time.

Limitations similar to those described in the varsity readers program must be established before the competition begins. Each student is usually allowed to check out one book during the designated period of time so more students must participate.

This competition could be the academic activity of a Homecoming spirit week or the core activity of an academic spirit week. The emphasis throughout the competition is on increasing the use of the library and emphasizing reading throughout the school. This type of competition can also be done on a homeroom basis or through clubs and sports teams. Prizes can usually be secured through the PTA or Boosters Club.

- *Library Study Program.* The librarian organizes volunteers from the faculty and community to be available once a week at a regularly scheduled time after school to help students who need assistance with homework.

Honor Society students may also help.

In a well-organized program, students request the type of academic assistance they need before the study session, and the librarian tries to arrange for someone to provide that type of assistance. Usually the librarian and a few volunteers can make this program successful.

- *Silent Reading Time.* A silent reading time is set aside

*Library is used as an interchangeable term with media center.

during the day once a week, once a quarter, or with whatever frequency is considered appropriate to emphasize reading in the school.

An important element of the program is for students and staff members to get something to read from the library before the silent reading time.

Usually English classes send students to the library the day before the silent reading period to make sure each student has a book to read.

- *Share-a-Class Program.* On a prearranged basis, teachers may schedule part of their classes to work in the library under the supervision of the librarian while the teacher works with the other section of the class in the classroom.

This type of program provides for more individualization of instruction and lets teachers provide a modified curriculum for special education students.

- *Library Tutor Program.* The librarian schedules Honor Society members and other students who do well academically to work in the library as student aides, but their real duty is to work on a one-on-one or small-group basis with students who need help.
- *Media Sharing Program.* The librarian offers to show a film to the majority of a teacher's class and supervise the class during the viewing. This frees the teacher to work with remedial or advanced groups of students.
- *Classroom Presentation.* The librarian should schedule several presentations to orient students about how to use the library, what new books are available, and other library-related topics.

Helping teachers introduce research projects in the classroom is another example of how the librarian can help student performance across the curriculum and creates a real link between the library and the educational program.

- *Parent Library Program.* This program increases parent involvement with the library. The librarian asks parents to volunteer to work in the library and support its programs and offers them information about helping students use the library and become better readers.

A parents' night in the library and parent check-out times can also be part of this program.

- *100 Percent Plan.* The librarian and teachers work together to encourage every student in the school to use the library during a set period of time.

This program usually works best on a quarter or semester basis and the librarian keeps track by checking off the names of the students on a computer list.

Near the end of the time period, personal invitations are issued to students who have not used the library. The last student to complete the 100 percent can be honored, as can the first student to use the library.

## Working with the Librarian

While few schools will attempt all these programs, implementing several of them will increase the effectiveness of the library without increasing the budget. Once the librarian actively courts students and staff members to increase the use of the library, more programs will become practical and the overall library program will continue to grow.

Not all librarians will be eager to implement programs such as those listed above, however. Some means to get a reluctant librarian more involved with the educational program of the school are:

1. Compliment the librarian on all activities in which students and teachers are encouraged to use the library. Ask for the librarian's input on library programs that might be successful and offer assistance in implementing them.
2. Choose a program that can easily be implemented and join with the librarian to make the program successful.
3. Involve the librarian with other teachers who would benefit from some of these programs. Gaining teacher support for the programs will often encourage the librarian to become involved.
4. Require the library specialist to establish some active programs in which students and teachers are encouraged to use the library. Make the requirement a part of the performance appraisal.
5. Take a schoolwide approach in establishing library use programs. The reading specialist is often interested in library programs and will organize and lead the staff toward implementing some of them.

If you believe the library should be the focus of the educational program at your school—or at least an active participant in it—some of these ideas may revitalize your library.

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# How To Sleep Better at Press Time

It's press time for the school newspaper. And if you're like some school principals, you're likely to lose some sleep knowing your students are putting their paper "to bed."

Principals have been tossing and turning at press time since 1969, when the federal judges ruled in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the school-house gate."

Following *Tinker*, a number of federal courts have handed down decisions indicating that the rights of public school journalists will be protected even though the publication in which their work appears are owned and operated by the school itself.

How do you know what control you *do* have over student-produced publications? And what should you do to make sure your actions do not violate the First Amendment?

Try these two steps:

## Step One: Be Familiar with the Law

Pay close attention to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and to court rulings involving the scope of student rights and school authority in regard to the student press. Make sure your student advisers and students are also well-versed in them. The most readily available authority is NASSP's *Legal Memorandum*, April 1984.

*Tinker* specifically ruled that when school officials take away a student's constitutional rights, they must base their actions on "something more than a mere desire to avoid the discomfort and unpleasantness that always accompany an unpopular viewpoint." A principal cannot censor any publication or article merely because it is controversial or because it criticizes the school, a school procedure, or the school system.

On the other hand, your students should understand the courts have held consistently that the First Amendment's sweeping command against suppression of speech and press does not promise absolute freedom of expression — that with their right to publish facts and opinions comes certain responsibilities. Foremost, they may not violate others' rights in the exercise of their own.

And, as the court stated in *Quarterman v. Byrd* in 1971, "[i]t is generally held that the constitutional right to free speech of public secondary school students may be modified or curtailed by school regulations 'reasonably designed to adjust these rights to the needs of the school environment.' "

## Step Two: Make Rules Within the Law

So how do you formulate rules that uphold *all* students' rights *and* protect the school environment?

It's not easy. Even the rulings of different federal court judges don't agree on whether schools can require advance approval of student publications in order to forecast the substantial disruption that would justify suppression.

We do know, as the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in *Baughman v. Freienmuth*, school rules imposing prior restraint must be drafted more precisely than rules imposing post-publication sanctions.

In general, school regulations that call for prior review and restraint on the distribution of student newspapers and other literature are constitutionally permissible *only* when they:

1. *Spell out precisely what is forbidden so that a reasonably intelligent student will know what he may and may not write.*

Most schools feel that they are on comfortable legal ground in prohibiting students from publishing and distributing material that:

- Is obscene, according to current community standards.
- Contains profanity — as defined by the community's major newspaper.
- Is libelous or slanderous, or that violates the rights of privacy.
- Advocates breaking any law or violating lawful school regulations.
- Would cause substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the school.
- Criticizes or demeans any individual or group because of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, age, ancestry, or marital status.
- Encourages action that endangers the health and safety of students.

Some school policies specifically prohibit ads for cigarettes, liquor, or any other product not permitted to be sold to teenagers. Others prohibit material that solicits funds from students.

Rule makers may run afoul of the First Amendment when they attempt to restrict endorsements of political candidates or ballot measures, whether these endorsements are made via editorial, article, letter, photograph, or cartoon.

Several of the items on the list, including obscenity and profanity, are large gray areas when it comes to legal suppression. Because the law on student press is still in flux, any rules you develop should be reviewed by your school attorney.

2. *State plainly the means by which students are to submit the materials for review.*

For the most part, newspaper advisers carry the responsibility for reviewing each article prior to its publication to determine if it satisfies the conditions specified in policy. The principal may also review copy prior to publication, but usually is committed to do so within 24 hours after it is submitted for review.

3. *Provide for prompt approval or disapproval of material students submit for review.*

Most acceptable school policies state that any decision to limit or approve the publication and distribution of student materials must be made within one to two school days after receiving the materials for review. When an appeal is brought before the board of education, the board must make a decision at its next scheduled meeting.

At each stage of review, student editors and staff members should be given the opportunity to respond to the reasons stated for suppression.

4. *Provide procedures for adequate and prompt student appeal of a decision to suppress publication, and a description of how it works.*

If there is disagreement regarding publication, most principals set up an editorial board to render an opinion. Typical composition of this board might include two high school administrators; three teachers, including the newspaper adviser; two newspaper staff members; and a student council member who is not on the newspaper staff. It might also include members of the school community.

Most school policies specify that, if the editorial board cannot solve the dispute, students may appeal to the superintendent of schools. Some schools take the student appeals process one more step, to the board of education, which renders a final determination.

When no appeals board is established, student appeals may go directly to the school superintendent or to his administrative panel. All appeals and decisions should be in writing.

Publication rules that don't attempt to exercise prior restraint of content are easier to defend, for example:

1. *Give a definition of "distribution" and its application to different kinds of material.*

This part of your policy would limit the time, place, and manner of student publication distribution.

- *Time.* The policy goal here is to encourage distribution when it will not disrupt classroom or cocurricular activities. On-campus distribution, then, might be limited to one hour before and one hour after the school day, between class periods, and during lunch periods. Distribution would be prohibited during assemblies and fire drills.
- *Place.* Your policy should encourage distribution that doesn't disrupt or restrict the normal flow of traffic of entranceways, within buildings, or outside corridors. It should prohibit distribution in classrooms, libraries, faculty and administrative offices, corridors adjoining those facilities, or in school facilities where the resulting noise would disrupt the orderly operation of the school.
- *Manner.* Your policy would prohibit students from confronting, coercing, or intimidating other students to accept the printed material. It should limit the distribution to a number that will not be disruptive to classes or other school activities. Also, to avoid littering, it might prohibit the materials from being left unattended at any place in the school or on school grounds.

2. *Specify what action will be taken if students don't comply with the rules.*

Usual policy language goes something like this: "Any student who willfully and knowingly violates any portion of these rules will be subject to suspension, expulsion, or other penalty in accordance with established disciplinary procedures."

Even if you stay fine-tuned to the law and make *and communicate* rules within the law, there's no guarantee that you still won't have a few fitful nights before and after your students make use of the free press. It's likely, though, that you will nod off sooner than before you took these steps to protect all students' rights — including the right to a safe and orderly learning environment.

*Written by Lu (Van Loozen) Fulbright*

### Place Emphasis on Discipline for Violation of Enforcible Publication Rules, Not on Efforts To Prevent Publication

The courts seem more likely to look favorably on prior review by school authorities when the publication is a newspaper connected with a journalism or English class, especially if the prior review is limited to a check for accuracy, because of the general power of the schools to regulate course content.

But in a legal jurisdiction where there exists strong opposition to any kind of prior restraint, the legal validity of prepublication regulation of even school-sponsored publications will remain uncertain until ruled upon directly by the courts.

If you're in such a jurisdiction, you'll want to shift your policy-drafting emphasis as much as possible from prior-restraint considerations to efforts to hold students accountable for their actions after the fact, rather than for their printed words. More and more, case law indicates that students can be disciplined for actions and conduct associated with publication and distribution of materials.

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# How To Start the School Year: Motivation, Enthusiasm Are Keys to Success

The success of a school depends on organized, skillful principals, prepared and enthusiastic teachers, and highly motivated students.

Much of this enthusiasm, motivation, and success depends on how well the principal organizes the first few weeks of the school year.

The first weeks are crucial because they can set the tone for the entire year.

If the principal is unorganized and/or unconcerned about the staff and students, the year is likely to begin and end with confusion, apathy, and little or no significant achievement for anyone.

If, on the other hand, the principal demonstrates his or her willingness and enthusiasm to work closely with staff members and students, the school year can be productive and enjoyable. A good attitude is contagious.

How can you start the year right?

More than 200 graduate students in school administration at Louisiana State University responded to the question: "What suggestions would you offer school principals to use in helping teachers start the year with a positive mental attitude?"

The graduate students, who were also teaching full time in public schools, had a multitude of suggestions, which are incorporated below:

## From the Beginning

- At the initial faculty meeting, clearly state the school goals and objectives. These objectives should be specific and listed in order of importance.
- Also explain the school discipline policy and stress at least 10 disciplinary goals that the staff members should focus on throughout the year.
- Avoid long, tedious meetings during the rest of the year. Instead of using unimaginative lectures, use visual aids to emphasize points. Address teachers' concerns and encourage their active participation. Talk with them, not at them.
- Be certain that all staff members—especially new teachers—know how to use instructional equipment (projectors, computers, etc.) and that the equipment is in working order.

  Ideally, a service representative should be on hand at the beginning of the year to demonstrate how to use the equipment, explain the special features, and tell the users what to do in case of malfunction.

  An orientation/refresher course is a good idea—even for the veterans.
- Staff members should also have an adequate supply of materials such as paper, ditto masters, pencils, pens, books, etc., and should know exactly how and where to locate additional supplies and equipment.
- Establish an accessible resource room for teachers. All too often, textbooks used in the classroom do not have sufficient information, additional drills, or explanations of objectives. The resource room should provide those extra materials teachers might need.

  Instructors must also have easy access to the room; they should not be required to contact the department head or administrator in order to use the room at any time during the school day.
- Maintain high visibility throughout the school and throughout the school day. As you walk through the halls and around campus, talk informally with teachers and students—on a personal basis, not as an administrator.
- Visit each classroom during the first week of each month for a "facility check." Make sure that all air conditioners and lights work, that seating capacity and supply of materials is adequate, and that the teacher does not have any questions about his or her room, schedule, or school policies.

## Establishing Good Relations

- Take the initiative to improve all lines of communication within the school. Hold informal conferences at least once a month with faculty members to be certain that they know what is expected of them.
- Present expectations clearly and in a positive manner, and be certain that any new teachers are thoroughly acquainted with all rules, regulations, policies, and procedures.
- Make sure that all teachers have a copy of the faculty manual and the student handbook.

- Post a calendar in a central location and list all dates for special events in the school and community. Keep parents informed about what is going on in your school also. Good communication extends beyond the school fence.
- Establish a good relationship with the local media. Newspapers and television and radio stations can keep the community informed and involved in what's going on at your school and, at the same time, promote attendance at sports events and special activities.
- Be certain that students also know what is expected of them and that you care about them as people. Make sure each student has a copy of the student handbook.
- Ensure a balanced teacher-student teaching load and assign teachers to classes that they are certified to teach. When possible, try to accommodate teachers' preferences for class schedules and planning times.
- Support teachers. Encourage their input and active participation in all facets of the school. Include them in goal setting and problem-solving workshops. Ask for their input when making any decisions that may affect them.
- Provide teachers with leadership opportunities in the school organizations. Ask them to chair committees and task forces. Trust their judgment.
- Also be sure to include teachers in planning for inservice programs. Make the sessions valuable and enjoyable.
- Be firm and fair in dealing with faculty members. Enforce rules and regulations equally and recognize teachers for their superior professional performance.
- Give faculty members positive reinforcement as often as possible; never criticize, condemn, or complain.
- Minimize paperwork and maximize actual teaching time. Avoid classroom interruptions by providing written daily announcements or by making announcements over the public address system during homeroom only.

## The Courageous Principal

It takes courage to be a superior principal. When you know you are right, keep going. People are looking for a principal who leads. Without a courageous principal, there is no strength in the school.

Principals must also be flexible, in search of new ideas, and open to change. They should evaluate themselves often by asking, "How could I have been more effective in this situation? What other approaches could I use?"

Innovation breeds success.

*Written by William A. Kritsonis, associate professor at Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, La., and editor of the* NFEAS Journal, *published by the National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision. He is a former superintendent, principal, and teacher.*

## A Sense of Purpose, Openness, and Optimism

Deal openly and rationally with others and strive to make this a standard of the school. Ask teachers to deal with students in a detached fashion; it is quite possible to be friendly and supportive yet remain clinical. Discourage staff gossip about students. Violence in any form, from fighting to corporal punishment, should not be tolerated—it strikes at the very heart of the school's purpose of developing thoughtful, rational behavior, and is an obstacle to the school's credibility. Do not manipulate students—keep them informed of what is happening and why. Listen to them carefully, and encourage them to inquire. Respond to students, parents, and staff with absolute honesty. While some other enterprises seem to tolerate a certain duplicity, school is the business of ideas. In this realm, intellectual honesty is the root of existence.

*From "Developing a Business like School Environment," by Jim Haas.* NASSP Bulletin, *Jan. 1983.*

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# How To Work Effectively with Student Teachers

Both student teachers and experienced teachers describe student as teaching the "one indisputably essential element" in professional education programs (Conant, 1963). Calls for reform in teacher education have recommended extending student teachers' experience which, in turn, will increase the responsibility of the public schools in educating prospective teachers.

As the educational leaders of the school, principals frequently select cooperating teachers and monitor the student teaching experience. Often, administrators are not educated to assist the preservice teacher and have not been provided with practical information or guidance pertaining to working with student teachers, but principals can affect the success of a student teacher and ease the transition from student teacher to beginning teacher.

Many teachers leave the profession during or at the end of their first year (Marso and Pigge, 1987). Time spent by the principal in working with the student teacher and encouraging professional development may be rewarded by the novice's assumption of a realistic perspective of teaching and increased ability to comprehend the "whole picture" of teaching.

Following is a list of suggestions for administrators to consider throughout the teaching experience.

## Prior to the Field Experience

● Interview the prospective student teacher. While each university and school district may have specific placement guidelines, the personal interview is an important first step in determining if the student teacher will be an appropriate match for the school. The interview should also provide information about the strengths and weaknesses of the student teacher.

An equally important component of the interview is the opportunity to assess the personality of the student teacher. The knowledge gained through the interview assists the principal in selecting the cooperating teacher.

● Select the cooperating teacher. Careful selection is critical to success in the field experience. After reviewing the literature, Haberman (1983) concluded that cooperating teachers are frequently cited as having the most significant influence on student teachers.

The selection of the cooperating teacher must be based on sound criteria. Effective cooperating teachers generally demonstrate the following qualities:

1. Minimum of three years of successful classroom teaching with at least one year in the particular content area that the student teacher will be teaching. Cooperating teachers should have experience teaching both students and subject matter prior to working with a student teacher, and should also have received favorable evaluations indicating the teacher is successful in the classroom.

2. Willingness to share students, classroom responsibilities, and professional expertise with a student teacher. Working with a student teacher requires a gradual relinquishing of most teaching responsibilities, while preparing the novice to assume these same responsibilities. Cooperating teachers must be willing to step back and allow the student teacher to assume responsibility for the students.

3. Participation in a workshop or coursework about supervision and evaluation of student teachers. Either the university or school district may provide training prior to or concurrent with the student teaching placement. The cooperating teacher should be knowledgeable about supervision and evaluation techniques in order to facilitate the professional development of the student teacher.

4. Willingness to allow the student teacher to develop a "personal model of teaching." Student teachers should be encouraged to try out their own teaching ideas in a supportive atmosphere, with appropriate planning and feedback from the cooperating teacher after the lesson.

5. Enthusiasm about teaching and a generally positive professional attitude. Student teachers tend to imitate the attitude of the cooperating teacher, and developing a positive perspective about the profession is important to students, parents, staff members, and administrators.

6. Ability to interact effectively with other teachers, administrators, staff members, students, parents, and university faculty members. The cooperating teacher models professional behavior beyond classroom teaching, including the ability to interact effectively with others, which affects teaching and student learning.

## During the Field Experience

● Welcome and introduce the student teacher to school

staff members. Student teachers tend to be nervous the first day of the field experience. Taking time for introductions and a brief tour of the building helps the student teacher feel part of the school and aids the important transition from college student to student teacher.

- Orient the student teacher to school policies. An overview of the staff handbook, student handbook, and staff member expectations will help student teachers become familiar with policies and procedures. It will also help them understand their role within the school.
- Include the student teacher on the staff mailing list, in mailboxes, and in social functions. Providing a "real" desk for the student teacher also helps the student teacher's self-perceptions about becoming a teacher. Student teachers frequently comment on these actions (or the lack thereof) and tend to see them as symbols of belonging on the school staff.
- Conduct at least one formal observation process and several informal sessions. The observations enable student teachers to gain feedback about their teaching and also introduce the professional evaluation system used in the school.

Informal contacts provide an opportunity for the student teacher to become accustomed to the presence of an administrator. For example, a brief drop-in visit in the classroom or a friendly greeting in the hallway helps student teachers recognize that they are included.

- Maintain communication with the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor to monitor the student teacher's progress. Open communication enables all persons responsible for supervising the student teacher to have input throughout the learning-to-teach process.

If a problem develops, everyone is informed and better able to assist the student teacher. In most school districts and universities, the administrator, university supervisor, and cooperating teacher share in the input of the student teacher's final evaluation.

## At the Completion of the Field Experience

- If asked, complete a recommendation form for the student teacher's placement file. The classroom observations, evaluation process, and contacts with both the student teacher and the cooperating teacher should provide necessary information for the recommendation.
- The administrator should arrange for a simulated (or actual) job interview with the student teacher. After the interview, discuss the rationale for including specific questions throughout the interview. The process provides an opportunity for the prospective teacher to practice interview skills and prepare for future interviews.
- Acknowledge the cooperating teaching and other staff members for offering their expertise and effort to "bring a new teacher on board" and for assisting in building the teaching profession.

Principals have the opportunity to play an important role in the professional development of student teachers. By carefully selecting the cooperating teacher, by having frequent interactions with the student teacher, and by implementing the suggestions above, a principal sets the stage for a successful student teaching program.

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# How To Work with Parents and Teachers To Mainstream Special Students

The regular classroom has become a more accepting environment for handicapped learners during the past 10 years. However, instructional mainstreaming practices continue to raise a variety of concerns and questions.

## Teacher Expectations of the Principal

Most teachers agree that the administrator's attitude must reflect a willingness to support and understand the dimensions of least restrictive placements. This attitude is enhanced by administrators' knowledge about the nature of exceptional and special education.

In reality, however, regular classroom teachers should not expect principals to be able to provide assistance for all their daily problems. Nevertheless, they should expect and receive appropriate support.

Administrative style, expertise, and commitment that are particularly desirable include:

- Augment forums organized and supported by principals to identify and discuss issues and problems related to the educational needs of handicapped students
- Frequent discussions with teachers regarding their specific mainstreaming situations
- A higher priority of finding support services for both teachers and students
- The understanding of parent concerns, frustrations, and goals and how these affect or should affect the school's program
- A deliberative placement procedure that protects and enhances both academic standards and the possibilities for student success.

Open communication among all parties, supported by the administration, fosters high morale among the faculty.

## Understanding the Mainstreamed Student

A key to the academic as well as the social and emotional success of a mainstreamed student largely depends on the degree to which the handicapped learners are accepted and understood by their regular classmates.

Options for preparing regular students for the mainstreaming program range from a "least said the better" approach to a full-scale orientation program. The selected approach will depend on the specific situation; however, essential elements for determining this approach are:

- How well do the students in the regular class interact with each other? How well do they deal with differences in others, i.e., speech defects, body shape, etc.?
- What are the social, emotional, and academic characteristics of the handicapped student? Do they deviate markedly enough from the norm to affect relationships if not properly addressed?
- What are the strengths of the handicapped student? It may be a hobby or interest that helps everyone focus on the positive side. If a student is being mainstreamed, someone believes he or she belongs there. What are the positive characteristics that supported this decision?
- What are the particular needs and experiences of the regular class students that may significantly enhance their receptivity to mainstreamed learners?

Many teachers have found the following ideas and materials helpful. Here is a sampling of available resources:

- "Kids on the Block" is a favorite with elementary children and probably effective with secondary students. It is a handicapped puppet show developed by Barbara Aiello, Suite 510, Washington Building, Washington, D.C. 20005, and sponsored by various school and community organizations around the country.
- Simulation activities are effective in that they put regular students into the "shoes" of the handicapped learner for a short period of time.
- Discussions with other handicapped students and adults give a real and personal look at and a better understanding of the student not only as a handicapped person with certain needs but also with similar goals, desires, and concerns as his or her fellow classmates.
- Discussions with siblings of handicapped youngsters, who are often affected both at home and at school, can provide an insight not often

discussed. This is especially important at the secondary level.
- Many films and filmstrips on the market vividly portray a wide range of individuals with handicapping conditions.

## Working with Mainstreamed Students

When selecting appropriate instructional materials, several factors must be considered.

First, what are the needs and skills of the teacher? If these needs are not properly addressed, the resource materials will not be fully utilized regardless of the administrator's judgment.

The second set of factors deals with the learning characteristics of handicapped students.

The following questions address these factors and provide a realistic reflection of the concerns teachers and administrators must face.

1. How much additional teacher time is necessary to use particular materials?
2. Will teachers have the time to utilize the aids?
3. How much does the use of the aids/materials influence the teacher to deviate from his or her standard practice?
4. Can other students use the materials?
5. Do the materials foster student-student interaction?
6. Do the aids foster practice and mastery of skills planned by the teacher? Do they foster transfer of learning and application?
7. Are the materials developed in a step-by-step design to avoid large jumps in cognitive or skill requirements?
8. Can students use the resources independently?
9. Do the materials utilize the student's strengths?
10. Do they accommodate learning modalities and styles and the students' interests?
11. Are the materials consonant with the learner's background, ability, and achievement levels?

## Parents and Educators Working Together

Parents and families with handicapped children face a wide variety of day-to-day dilemmas and uncertainties that affect them both economically and psychologically. Educators must understand parents' concerns, frustrations, joys, and anxieties. When teachers and administrators know what parents have faced and are facing now, it helps to further the development of trusting relationships.

The receptive educator conveys an attitude of respect when he or she listens to parents and adds to their self-worth by encouraging them to share their insights. Such partnerships are founded on cooperative and communicative relationships.

Several illustrations that educators may find helpful in solidifying such partnerships are:
- Assist parents in contacting other parents of handicapped children and organizations devoted to helping parents
- Assist parents in furthering their adolescents' ability to generalize academic and social behavior to home and community
- Provide literature for parents related to general issues or specific concerns
- Send periodic communiqués to parents to keep them abreast of the instructional program and classroom experiences
- Recognize the strength and limitations of some parents in working with their children.

## The Special Class Teacher

One of the more critical roles of special educators is as consultants. However, many have not yet developed the level of consultative competence that will allow them to perform this function effectively. Administrators must help teachers develop this competency. Planned conference schedules will help eliminate the "only by chance" communication, thus ensuring that teachers and parents meet on a continuing basis. While such arrangements may be costly in time, the substance of such dialog will often lead to peace of mind.

Several other roles that special class teachers and their administrators can provide are:
- Release valves for both the teacher and handicapped student
- Resource for information related to general knowledge about handicapping conditions, i.e., characteristics and needs of handicapped learners; instructional strategies including goals, objectives, content, methods, materials, and evaluation; styles of behavior management
- Intermediaries with families and other agencies concerned with handicapped learners.

Mainstreaming is not a one-person show. Successful mainstreaming is not easy and does require commitment of time, energy, patience, and constructive leadership. To be successful, everyone must be actively involved, including administrators.

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# How To Work with Student Leaders To Meet School and Student Goals

The organizational structures of our schools are formally defined by legal policies; however, within the mandated structure is room to tailor the organization and management to meet the needs of students and staff members and to accomplish the school's mission.

Agreement among students and staff about the school's mission is important. As a viable network of linking agents in a school's student body, student leaders have the potential to help define and establish policies and projects to help achieve the school's mission.

## Meeting School Goals

Principals can and should work with student leaders to define and meet school goals. They should listen to student concerns and suggestions and encourage their input. Some other strategies are:

- Encourage student leaders to participate in policy-making activities of the faculty and administration. Student council members will earn the respect of students and teachers if they are given the opportunity to participate in guiding the school to its mission.
- Experiment with involving student leaders in selection of faculty members. The experience sends an important message about the student-centeredness of the school to students, parents, and faculty members. After the candidate for the teaching position is selected, students who were involved in the interview process assume a high level of responsibility for making the new teacher a part of their school.
- Ask student leaders for recommendations when selecting activity or organization sponsors. Sponsors should have an interest and a sense of commitment to the activities, as this will be reflected in the goals of the student organization and its activities. Thus, the whole school is affected.
- Support the student council by providing its officers with a meeting time and place, ready access to the administration, and selected "perks," such as honor passes.
- As a community service, work with the student council to establish a recorded information telephone line to announce school activities and programs. Request a telephone number with an alpha code that is easily associated with the school. For example, 555-GPHS is an easy number for Glen Park High School students and their parents to remember.
- Instruct the student council president and other student leaders to report to the principal during emergency drills. Their close association with the administration during emergencies will enhance communication in the school.

## Meeting Student Goals

Administrators can also help students meet their individual and student group goals by using the following strategies:

- Require student leaders to formulate and file with an administrator, the goals and objectives of each group activity. Also require them to file progress reports.
- Train student leaders in group process techniques that encourage group members to become involved in decision making.
- Support requirements that membership in service organizations be based on demonstrated service to the school or community rather than on student popularity.
- Help student leaders develop and adhere to program budgets. All fund-raising projects should be approved by the principal, who should make sure that proceeds are documented in the budget and that approved accounting procedures are followed.
- Prepare future student leaders by organizing a student-centered and student-produced orientation program for feeder schools. Audiovisual programs about the school's curricular and cocurricular activities programs tell the school's story and provide a leadership experience for students.
- Encourage student leaders to arrange, plan, conduct, and participate in the evaluation of student programs such as assemblies, voter registration drives, and blood donation drives.
- Involve student leaders in defining the process for selecting honors students. With the advice and consent of the faculty members, selection processes should be inherently fair, open, and consistent with the nature of the honor.
- Provide opportunities for student leaders and activity sponsors to participate in regional, state, and national leadership growth programs.

- With the help of student leaders, develop and annually revise a student handbook that not only lists student activities and their specifications for membership/leadership, but also includes information about the curriculum and the student conduct code.
- Encourage students to record their participation in student activities in a central student activities file. Consider developing the file into a computer data base for efficient retrieval.
- Maintain a centralized calendar for scheduling meetings, fund-raising projects, programs, and other special projects of student activities programs.
- Assist student leaders whose group's programs fall short of their purpose by working with them on improvements. Be willing to suspend or dissolve programs that do not fulfill their purpose. Students who are involved in unsuccessful programs should be counseled about other opportunities for growth through involvement in other activities.

## The Value of Cooperation

Student activities programs provide many opportunities for student growth in communication, problem solving, decision making, and leadership.

However, if the students are to have the opportunity to use these skills, they must have a vehicle for presenting, evaluating, and integrating their ideas.

Principals also need group dynamics/group process skills because the elements in a school environment—students, parents, faculty members, staff members, and administrators—are loosely coupled. Ability to use processes that are helpful in planning and in seeking consensus within and between these groups, such as the nominal group and Delphi techniques, will unite the school and encourage cooperation and communication.

Administrators should be certain that student leaders are also familiar with these techniques and their value.

As they work with administrators to meet the goals of schools and the goals of individuals, student leaders enjoy the satisfaction of taking part in school policy making. At the same time, administrators receive valuable input from students and help them to sharpen their communication and decision-making skills.

*Written by Sandra McCalla, principal at Captain Shreve High School, Shreveport, La.*

### Are Students Involved in Deciding Crucial Issues?

. . .More and more of our high school youngsters become disenchanted with the decision-making process at the highest levels of our government. This disenchantment only reinforces the helplessness many students feel about the existing governance of their schools. Public high school organizational structures and management practices reflect an unfortunately prevalent characteristic of educational thought—hardening of the attitudes.

No high school principal can find a greater challenge to his leadership skills than to share his power with students willingly. No greater satisfaction awaits the principal than that of succeeding in humanizing and democratizing his school through the collaborative learning inherent in sharing the decision-making process of the school with his students. The principal who willingly heads in this direction will have his energy and imagination challenged and tested, but he will be a happier person and have a happier school for the experience.

*James Calkins. "Are Students Involved in Deciding Crucial Issues?"* NASSP Bulletin, *October 1974.*

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# How To Write for Publication

As a prospective writer, the big question that you must ask yourself is: *Why* do you want to write?

You may want to impress your supervisors and colleagues, or you may want to enhance your resumé. These are perfectly legitimate reasons, but if they are the only reasons you can offer, your writing career may well fail.

Most important is that you have something of merit to say. The motivation of successful writers in journals and magazines is a keen desire to communicate their thoughts on a subject they perceive to be important.

Once you have a topic clearly in mind you will need to identify the most appropriate publication for your message. This may be a fairly easy step, as you will probably be treating a topic with which you have a good deal of experience and more than a passing interest. The appropriate journal may well be on your office bookshelf or in the school library.

Gather up several recent issues of the target journal—or journals, if more than one seem appropriate—and study them carefully. Take mental note of the following points:

- Are the topics covered compatible with the idea you have in mind? Is the audience for which the publication is intended the best one for your topic? Can you identify another journal that might be directed to a more appropriate group of readers?
- If the publication in hand is indeed the best one for your purpose, study the style of the articles it contains. Are they scholarly and research-oriented, with many footnotes and bibliographic citations? Or, do they emphasize the practical, perhaps providing step-by-step instructions or "how to" advice? While many journals include a cross section of theoretical and practical pieces, the primary focus of the publication will probably be on one or the other.
- Do the articles tend to be lengthy, incorporating numerous charts, graphs, and tables, or are most brief and to the point? Are photographs included?

After satisfying yourself that both your topic and approach are appropriate for the publication you have selected, and that you can produce an article that will "fit" its editorial style, ask one last, important question: Has the journal recently published other articles that deal with your topic? If so, can you provide a different approach to the topic? Your answer here will determine whether you should proceed with your first selection or look to a second choice.

## Making Contact: First Impressions Are Important

A good starting point is to write a letter of inquiry to the editor, outlining your proposal and explaining why you think it merits publication.

Although such a letter is not a "must," it can help you in several important ways. First, if your analysis has been off target and there is no interest in your topic, you will have saved yourself the time and effort of writing for the wrong journal. Second, if the editor expresses an interest in reviewing your manuscript, you have set the stage for its arrival. Most editors are inundated with unsolicited materials; the name recognition you have developed through your initial communication may well ensure that your manuscript receives more careful consideration than would have been accorded had it arrived unannounced.

And now for a few basics regarding the manuscript itself; as in all things, first appearances are most important.

Be sure your manuscript is typed neatly on good quality white paper. Include a cover sheet that gives the title of your article, your name and title, and the address and telephone number where you can be reached. It is also a good idea to include your name at the top of each manuscript page.

In addition to neatness, a few other format basics will help to ensure favorable consideration for your work:

- Submit an original and one clear copy, or two good photocopies. (Two copies are generally sufficient; however, some journals may require more.)
- Use standard size 8½ × 11-inch paper.
- All copy, including footnotes, quotations, and references, should be double spaced. (If accepted, the editors will use the copy you submit to make changes, etc. Single-spaced copy is impossible to edit clearly, and this may be the final deciding factor in determining whether a fairly good article is accepted for publication.)
- Allow generous margins on all sides of each page.
- Type footnotes and references on a separate page at the end of the article. Do the same for tables and charts.

## What About the Article Itself?

While the focus of journals will vary, editors use the same general criteria in judging the merits of unsolicited manuscripts. The following list, used by the editors of the *NASSP Bulletin*, is applicable to any publication.

*Subject Matter*
- Has interest and appeal to the target audience.
- Provokes thought and stimulates ideas.
- Is timely and informative.
- Contributes to the field of educational literature.
- Balances the theoretical and the practical.
- Is complete in making its point.

*Writing*
- Clear.
- Concise.
- Smooth.
- Logical.
- Consistent.

*Technical Style*
- Establishes purpose and points out limitations.
- Arouses interest.
- Avoids educational jargon.
- Uses examples.
- Has variety in structure.
- Summarizes effectively.

Most journals follow an established style, such as those developed by the University of Chicago and the American Psychological Association. However, most editors do not expect that all authors will follow "house style" to the letter. Rather, the most basic requirement of style is adherence to the elementary rules of grammar and good usage.

In addition, accuracy and completeness of information are imperatives. Be sure to check your final draft for consistency. All too often publication dates or authors' names as spelled in the text do not correspond to those in the reference list. And, check your citations carefully. Are titles, dates, and page numbers correct? Have you provided the following information: author (or editor), title, publisher and city of publication, date of publication?

Remember that the author is responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the information contained in his or her manuscript.

## What's the Next Step?

Most editors will acknowledge receipt of your manuscript almost immediately. Then, depending on their review process, it may take anywhere from a few weeks to several months before you learn the disposition of your article.

The key here is to be patient; the review process can be very time consuming. It is common practice for editors to send manuscripts to one or more readers for reactions. Wait at least six weeks before sending a follow-up inquiry to the editor.

Just as review processes vary, every journal has a somewhat different procedure for handling accepted manuscripts. For example, the time from acceptance to publication may be as great as two years, or as little as several months.

The degree to which the author is involved in the editorial process will also vary from journal to journal. Some—generally the technical publications—may involve the author at every step, beginning with reviewing the edited manuscript. Other publications ask authors to review the typeset copy of their edited manuscript. The author is expected to look for factual errors or any distortion in meaning that may have occurred during the editing process.

It is important to remember that changes in typeset copy are expensive, so this is not the place to make arbitrary changes. In fact, because of the expense involved, many editors have eliminated this step, and contact the author only when they have specific questions.

When responding to editor's queries, keep in mind that deadlines are all-important in the publishing world. Be prompt.

Procedures for assigning copyright may also vary among journals. Common practice, however, is to require the author to assign copyright to the publisher. If this is an area of concern be sure you understand the policy before you sign a copyright statement.

Finally, the best of articles may be turned down for any one of many good reasons, such as lack of space or too many articles about that subject. Don't be discouraged if one or more of your manuscripts meets this fate.

*written by Carol Bruce*

### Need Help with Your Writing?

Several recent NASSP publications are designed to help you improve your writing skills:
- "How To Improve Your Writing," *Tips for Principals*, December 1982.
- *Writing in the Schools*, by Allan A. Glatthorn, 1981.

For ordering information, contact NASSP Publication Sales, 1904 Association Dr., Reston, Va. 22091.

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